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REVIEWS

Philips 55in
Ambilight TV
Marantz AV8805
processor
BenQ TK800
DLP projector
ATC HTS40
on-wall speakers

SONY'S SUPER OLED!

Gorgeous 65in AF8 TV delivers a 4K HDR masterclass

PLUS
Panasonic
aims high
with UHD
Blu-ray



Dolby delight

LG's flagship Atmos
soundbar on trial

FILM & TV

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- TOMB RAIDER
- RED SPARROW
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The top 30
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Double vision!

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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: August 9, 2018

Daft Punk is playing at our house..., p23



Welcome

Reacquainting myself with a catalogue of classic film scores for our roundup this issue (see p23) has been an absolute blast – even if I have spent much of the last month unable to stop humming the *Batman*



theme. Home cinema fans get the most immersive visual experience around, but we also get some of the best, most expertly recorded music going. It's worth celebrating.

Unfortunately, not all of it is widely available to own in physical form outside of the movie's Blu-ray disc – and when it is, can be very costly. **Fancy kicking back with a CD of the *Enter The Dragon* soundtrack?** That'll be £23. Want it on vinyl? Twice as much again.

The good news is *The Greatest Showman*'s OST has smashed records and remained at no. 1 in the UK market for 19 weeks (at the time of writing). Here's hoping it kickstarts a soundtrack revival and I can get my hands on *Predator*...

Mark Craven
Editor



MENU



CONTRIBUTORS



John Archer:
The experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Jon Thompson:
Film producer and post-production expert delves into Hollywood and AV



Steve May:
HCC's former Ed, is one of the UK's most respected AV journo



Martin Pipe:
Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the industry



Richard Stevenson:
Former Editor of the UK CE trade journal ERT



Ed Selley:
Audiophile Ed mixes his home cinema passion with a love of vinyl



Vincent Teoh:
Professional video calibrator writes about technology and tweaking

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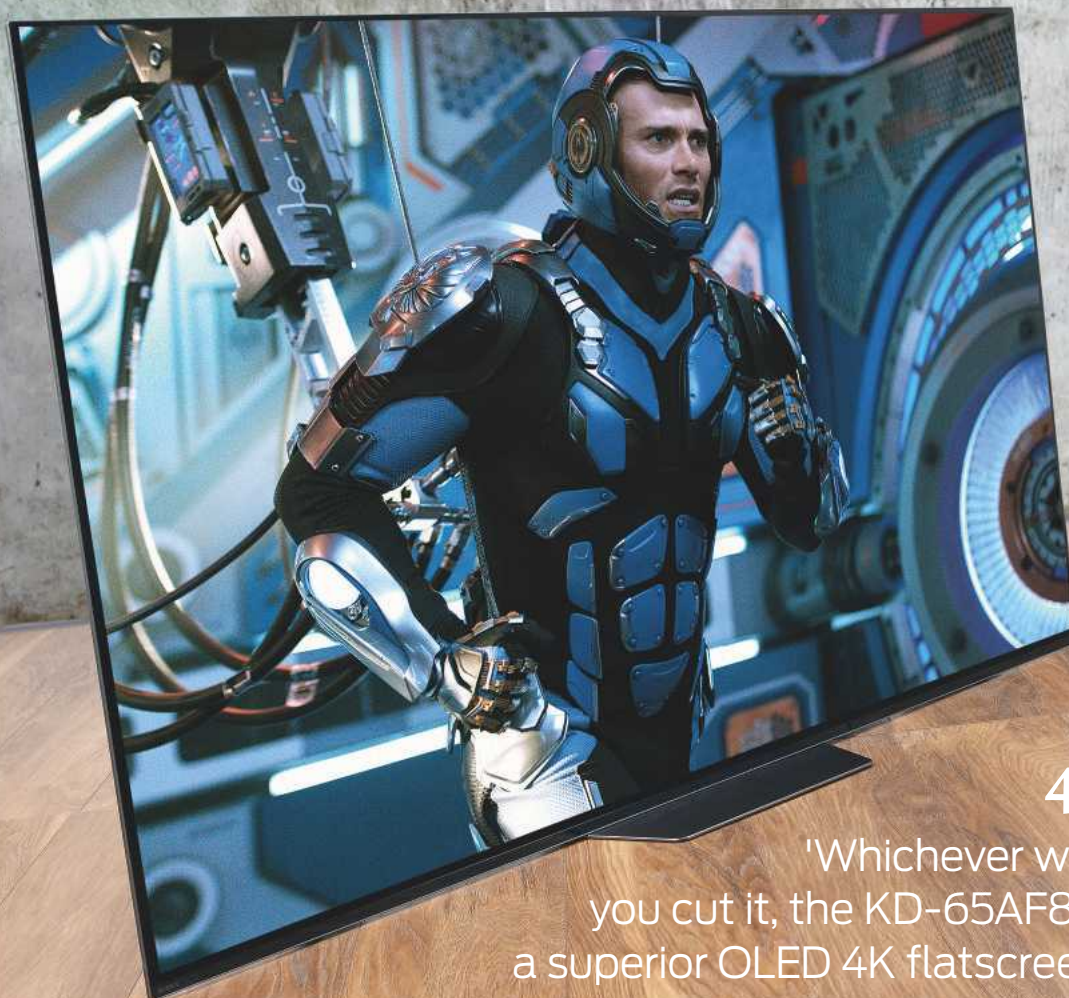
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BULLETIN

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 LOEWE Bild.3 OLED range gains 65in 4K model **AMAZON** Move over Sky, there's a new football player in town **AT THE 'PLEX** This month's cinema releases **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in bite-sized chunks **READY PLAYER ONE** Prepare for a pop culture ride on 4K Blu **& MORE!**

Take control of sound

Monitor Audio CP-IW260X/CP-IW460X → www.monitoraudio.com



Monitor Audio has added a pair of new models to its premium 'Controlled Performance' (CP) in-wall speaker stable. The ribbon tweeter-based CP-IW460X (pictured, £1,350) and dome tweeter-based CP-IW260X (£850) are both three-way designs using 6.5in bass drivers and 4in mid-range units. Suitable for both horizontal and vertical installations (the ribbon tweeter module is rotatable), the speakers feature closed-back enclosures and claim an easy fit via a patented Tri-Grip mounting system.

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Sonos speaks up

Sonos Beam → www.sonos.com

With its Beam soundbar, Sonos is adding Amazon Alexa voice control and targeting a more mass-market price point (£400) than its larger Playbar. The Beam – available in black or white finishes – packs four full-range drivers, a single tweeter and trio of passive bass radiators. HDMI (ARC) and digital optical audio inputs provide TV hookup; partner it with a Sonos SUB and Play:1 speakers for 5.1 audio. 'We believe we've created the best, most versatile, smart speaker in the world,' says the company.



Atmos trio to hit the UK



French corp AV Industry has announced affordable Dolby-certified Atmos upfiring modules

from its three loudspeaker brands (Elipson, Tangent and Eltax) are arriving at UK retailers. All models are designed to fit snugly atop floorstanding speakers from the companies, but there's nothing to stop buyers mixing things up. Pricing is as follows: Elipson Prestige Facet 6ATM (£350p/p, pictured); Tangent Spectrum XATM (£250p/p); Eltax Monitor ATM (£150p/p). www.av-industry.com

Quad aims for your ears



British loudspeaker brand Quad is spreading its wings and releasing its first ever headphones.

The Quad ERA-1s use planar magnetic drivers, said to display qualities akin to the electrostatic designs used in the company's ESL speaker, with a natural, accurate sound promised via driver matching and 'vibration suppression technology.' The 'phones are available soon for £600, and ship with a carry-case, detachable 2m cable and a choice of ear-cups. www.quad-hifi.co.uk

Take Command of AV

Polk Audio preps for UK invasion with the help of Amazon's Alexa AI

Polk Audio has essentially partnered an Amazon Dot with a 2.1 soundbar, and it seems like a marriage made in heaven. The Polk Command Bar is the first soundbar to launch with full Alexa voice control and functionality. Like any other Amazon smart device, it's able to control thermostats and manage smart lighting systems, as well as navigate your music and tell the occasional joke.

What's more, there's a perfectly proportioned space on the back to accommodate an Amazon Fire TV stick, complete with USB power.

The package will suit most larger screen sizes. It stands 50.8mm tall, and can be either placed on a table or wall-mounted using built-in keyholes slots.

Behind the grille are two 3in full-range drivers and twin 1in tweeters. The bar partners wirelessly to a compact subwoofer, which uses a down-firing 6.5in bass driver.

Interactive experience

HCC has had an early preview of the Command Bar, and was impressed with its slick usability. The bespoke Alexa implementation offers direct voice control over inputs and volume, and works with any connected Fire TV streamer. This means music



Mike Greco: 'We have a lot of experience building very compact, very dynamic woofers and tweeters'

sources, such as Amazon Music, TuneIn and Audible, benefit directly from the soundbar's audio system.

The Alexa interface is actually raised 2mm, so as not to impede its far-field microphones. But if the volume of the soundbar is too loud for clear recognition, the supplied IR remote features an Action button which automatically lowers system volume so that commands can be heard.

'Today with voice you can get instant access to content and real control of your home automation experience. It's a game-changer as far as we're concerned,' says brand manager Mike Greco.

The Command Bar seems well built and offers two HDMI 2.0 connections, both HDCP 2.2 compliant. There's also an optical digital audio output for users whose TVs do not support HDMI ARC.

When it comes to playback, Polk doesn't attempt to offer any find of *faux* surround sound. However, the 'bar does feature basic Movie, Music and Sports presets. The Movie mode boosts bass, while Music offers a flatter frequency response. The Sports mode favours dialogue, but can be used with news and talk content.

More significantly, there's also Polk Voice Adjust, a proprietary dialogue-enhancing filter designed to combat onscreen mumbles. Poor dialogue clarity is the number one complaint from TV users, says Greco.

Listening to a combination of movies and music, the 'bar shows a knack for going loud and offers genuine theatrical dynamics. 'We've been making soundbars for a long time. We have a lot of experience building very compact, very dynamic woofers and tweeters,' says Greco. Priced at £350, it looks like a tempting proposition.

The Command Bar is bundled with a wireless subwoofer



Playlist...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

Black Panther (Ultra HD Blu-ray)

This Marvel blockbuster marks a new milestone for black superheroes and provides a truly regal viewing experience on 4K Blu-ray. Wakanda forever, indeed!



Accident Man (R2 DVD)



British action star Scott Adkins plays a hitman with a conscience in this enjoyable comic book flick.

Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation (All-region BD)



Not only is the fifth *M:I* an audio-visual *tour de force* on Blu-ray, but it's also the perfect way to prepare for the upcoming sequel.

Grease (Ultra HD Blu-ray)



The musical smash looks and sounds better than ever on this 40th anniversary 4K platter.

Vigil (All-region BD)



Arrow's trip through New Zealand cinema continues with a BD outing for Vincent Ward's haunting debut.

At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?
Catch these this month

Incredibles 2



July 13: Having stepped away from animation to helm live-action flicks *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* and *Tomorrowland*, director Brad Bird makes his return to Pixar with this long-awaited sequel to his 2004 superhero smash.

Mission: Impossible – Fallout



July 25: And speaking of *Mission: Impossible...* here's the latest instalment in the popular action series, which reunites Tom Cruise with director Chris McQuarrie and finds the star risking his neck with even more outlandish stunts.

Ant-Man & The Wasp

August 03: Presumably set before *Avengers: Infinity War*, this sequel will hopefully reveal why Marvel's tiniest hero and his partner were absent from that game-changing superhero blockbuster.

B&W to boost Philips TVs

Speaker company and flatscreen specialist plan IFA product reveal

TP Vision, the owner of the Philips TV brand, has inked a deal with British audio specialist Bowers & Wilkins that will see the company sharing its sonic expertise with the flatscreen marque. It's a partnership 'based on the pursuit of excellence,' we're told.

The first fruits of what is a multi-year exclusive arrangement will make its debut at the IFA technology expo at the end of August. Although initial details are thin on the ground, it's safe to assume show-goers will see B&W speaker systems integrated into Philips TVs. Says B&W's Chief Revenue Officer, Richard Campbell: 'The superb new line of Philips TVs will introduce our well-known audio performance to a new consumer audience who will be able to enjoy first-hand the incredible experience only we can provide.'

Adds Martijn Smelt, Chief Marketing Officer for TP Vision: 'For far too long, as an industry, we have allowed sound quality to be the poor relation when considering TV performance. [It's] a challenge that has been further exaggerated by the outstanding quality of our OLED sets. So I'm delighted that we have been able to partner with the world's best audio company – Bowers & Wilkins – to ensure that in future our Philips high-end TV sound will offer a uniquely premium experience.'

TP Vision says the partnership will benefit from both companies having a long-lasting tradition of developing in-house bespoke technologies, ensuring 'quality control' over the whole R&D and production process.

Growing trend

This Philips/B&W collaboration is the latest to hit the TV industry as companies seek to leverage the sonic know-how (and brand recognition) of audio favourites.

LG has previously partnered with Harman/Kardon for the sound systems on its OLED and SUHD TVs, although as that brand has now fallen under the ownership of rival Samsung, it has forged a new alliance with Meridian Audio. Toshiba recently announced it was working with Onkyo on TV sound, and TCL incorporates JBL speakers in its flatscreens. Panasonic's 'Blade' soundbar, found with its FZ950 OLED, is tuned by its sister brand Technics.



We'd be interested in a flatscreen TV with the bass prowess of B&W's DB subwoofer...

Optoma marries laser to 1080p

Ultra-short-throw HZ40UST projector targets telly addicts and gamers

Able to cast a 100in image from a distance of just 30cm, Optoma's latest projector has an eye on media rooms and living spaces where cable runs and ceiling installations are a no-go.

The ultra-short throw HZ40UST may use regular Full HD DLP optics, but it combines these with a laser light source to deliver a claimed 20,000-hour lamp life and 4,000 Lumens brightness suitable for daytime viewing – Optoma suggests its own ALR100 (Ambient Light Reflecting) screen as a partnering canvas.

Designed to be the hub of a fuss-free system, the projector packs dual HDMI inputs, VGA input,

composite AV port and a powered USB for charging a streaming dongle. Ethernet, RS-232 and 12V trigger connections support automated systems.

The unit can feed a separate audio setup via 3.5mm out, but also offers an onboard 10W speaker. 3D playback is also supported, and Optoma says the PJ features a 'low latency', so that gamers will enjoy quick response times.

The HZ40UST is available now, priced at around £2,500. www.optoma.co.uk

The HZ40UST claims a living room-friendly brightness of 4,000 Lumens



VPL-VW760ES

4K

 TRILUMINOS
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- 4K Resolution: 4096 x 2160
- Laser Light Source
- 2000 ANSI Lumen Brightness
- Up to 20,000 Hours Maintenance Free
- HDR Compatibility
- Exceptional Dynamic Contrast
- 4K Motionflow and Reality Creation

Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

The 007 Diaries

Back in print for the first time in decades, Roger Moore's account of the making of his first James Bond film

(*Live and Let Die*) has been reissued as a dinky £15 hardback by The History Press. It's a very welcome re-release, too, as Moore is a witty and engaging storyteller, ensuring that there's plenty here to enjoy – from practical jokes to the difficulties of shooting the famous alligator farm sequence.

Original Stormtrooper Cheeseboard

We've seen some pretty cheesy *Star Wars* merch over the

decades, but this really takes the (water) biscuit. As you can see, it's a cheeseboard in the shape of a Stormtrooper helmet – with built-in storage for its cheese fork and trio of knives. If you fancy yourself as a bit of a Boba Feta, head to IWantOneOfThose.com, and order this for £30.

The Man Who Fell to Earth: Novel to Film

The latest release from Arrow Books sees critic Samuel J. Umland examining Nic Roeg's

mesmerising 1976 science-fiction masterpiece, first via a thorough exploration of Walter Tevis' 1963 novel, and then through a detailed account of the movie's production. Though a little pricey at £20 for just 104 pages, this insightful tome is still a treat for fans of Roeg's complex classic.

Amazon lines up football

Streaming giant grabs Premier League rights for 2019/2020 season



Below: Rakuten will stream *Proud Mary* this July
Bottom: Chili is a movie download/shopping hub

Amazon has picked up live broadcast rights for 20 matches of the English Premier League, and will make the games available for free to subscribers to its Prime service.

The acquisition of the streaming package means football fans will see Premier League games spread across long-term broadcaster Sky, newer rival BT Sport, and Amazon Prime Video.

The deal, which lasts for three years and begins with the 2019/2020 season gives Amazon two entire game weeks, both around the Christmas period. The company will stream all ten fixtures in the first December midweek round, and then the ten fixtures on Boxing Day. It will be the first time a full round of Premier League games has been made available to view.

While the acquisition is something of a coup for Amazon, the package it has purchased is one that had been left unsold during the rights sell-off earlier in the year.

During that initial auction, Sky purchased four packages, totalling 128 games per season. BT picked up a single package of 32 games, and has since added a further 20.

'We are always looking to add more value to Prime, and we're delighted to now offer, for the first time, live Premier League matches to Prime members at no extra cost to their membership,' says Jay Marine, Vice President of Prime Video in Europe.

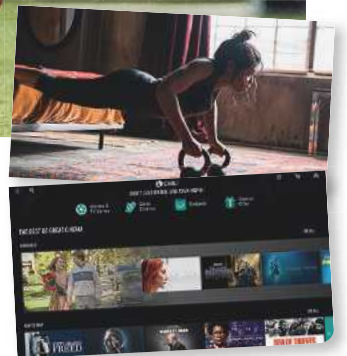
Amazon has not yet made any comment on the format its football streams will take, but it would be a surprise if this premium content wasn't broadcast in Ultra HD – something Sky has been doing since 2016.

Stream on

Just as Amazon is seeking to disrupt the norm when it comes to UK sports viewing, 2018 is looking like the year that Netflix faces stronger competition from rival video-on-demand/SVOD platforms. One is Chili, which is making a push to be seen as a 'one-stop entertainment shop' for UK film/TV enthusiasts, and offers a hybrid physical/digital model that does away with a monthly subscription.

Launched in Italy in 2012, Chili claims backing from Warner Bros, Paramount Pictures, Viacom (Universal), Sony Pictures and 20th Century Fox, and makes new and back-catalogue content available on a rental/download basis through smart hardware and tablets/phones. While image quality peaks at 1080p (with 'SD' and 'HD' tiers below), pricing seems keen, particularly with 'flash sales' offering movies for as little as 99p. And where Chili really breaks the mould is with its website, which also doubles as a shopping mart – click on a movie title and you may find the option of ordering it on disc (DVD, Blu-ray, 4K Blu-ray); buying official merchandise (such as *Black Panther* LEGO); or even shopping for clothes.

For the more technically minded, Rakuten TV's upstart Dolby Vision/Dolby Atmos movie streaming platform continues to shout about its latest titles. Confirmed for the second half of July (all in 4K HDR) are *Pacific Rim: Uprising*, action flick *Proud Mary*, *Ready Player One* and comic thriller *Thoroughbreds*.



This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Amazon fuses Fire and Echo

In the most blindingly obvious move imaginable, Amazon has launched a new gadget combining its Fire TV media streamer and Echo smart speaker. The result is the Amazon Fire TV Cube, which promises all of the features and functionality of the two separate devices (plus enhanced voice control over your telly) and recently went on sale in the US priced \$120.

2 Investing in Freeview

BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and network operator Arqiva have pledged to spend £125m across the next five years to speed up Freeview's transition to a fully hybrid platform. The first fruit of this is a Freeview Play mobile app that launches later this year.

3 Dolby Cinema coming to UK

Dolby Laboratories is partnering with Odeon Cinema Group on the UK's first deployment of Dolby Cinema (incorporating Dolby Vision laser projection and Dolby Atmos technologies). Seven Dolby Cinema sites will rollout nationwide over the next several years as part of Odeon Cinema Group's upgrade strategy, which also includes the installation of thousands of luxury recliner seats, new Oscar's bars and 'innovative food and beverage counters' (whatever that means).

4 Eureka calls in the cops

Here's one for fans of Hong Kong action cinema: Eureka Entertainment will release a limited edition Blu-ray double-pack of Jackie Chan's *Police Story* and *Police Story 2* on August 20, sourced from new 4K restorations of both films.

5 Sky secures more movies

Following its success with *Monster Family*, *Anon* and *The Hurricane Heist*, Sky Cinema Original Films (which makes films available to Sky Cinema customers day-and-date with their cinema release) has secured UK distribution rights to writer-director Steven Knight's eagerly-awaited neo-noir *Serenity*. Also confirmed for release later this year are family drama *Life Itself*, Ted Bundy true crime thriller *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*, and the Pierce Brosnan action flick *Final Score*.

6 Are Brits baffled by tech?

British consumers are suffering from 'gadget confusion' according to the results of a new study undertaken on behalf of smart home provider Centrica Hive. The research claims that 'millions of us' are baffled by the number of buttons, symbols and switches on devices, while a significant percentage never bother to look at the instructions. It also found that half of all smart speaker owners don't use them for anything beyond playing music.

7 Sony TVs get Assistant

Sony is making its AF8, XF90, XF85, XF80 and XF75 4K flatscreens with Android TV even smarter via a Google Assistant update. This promises to deliver a greater range of voice control functions, with Sony claiming the TVs can 'serve as a smart hub to more than 1,500 compatible smart home devices from over 225 popular brands.'

8 'What's your damage?'

Arrow is celebrating the 30th anniversary of Michael Lehmann's black comedy *Heathers* with a new 4K restoration that opens at selected UK cinemas from August 8. And don't fret if it doesn't play near you, as Arrow Video will also be bringing its restoration to Blu-ray on September 10.

9 Bristol rebranded

The UK's largest consumer AV trade show is changing its name. Starting next year, 'Sound & Vision Bristol' will officially be re-titled 'The Bristol Hi-Fi Show', which is what most people call it anyway. The organisers claim that it helps reinforce a move away from home cinema (boo!) and greater focus on hi-fi enthusiasts.

10 Anime series stands alone

If you liked the look of Manga's *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex Deluxe Edition* Blu-ray boxset (reviewed back in HCC #286), but were put off by the £100 price tag, there's some good news. A new eight-disc Blu-ray boxset that ditches the three OVA movies and just offers the 52-episode *Stand Alone Complex* series will be available from August 8, priced around £55.



Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

McGregor goes to Sleep



Ewan McGregor has landed the role of the grown-up Danny Torrance in the film adaptation of Stephen King's *The Shining* sequel *Doctor Sleep*. Mike Flanagan, who adapted the King novel *Gerald's Game* for Netflix last year, has been tapped to direct.

HBO game for prequel

HBO has announced that it has greenlit one of the five potential *Game of Thrones* spin-offs it has been developing. Created by George R.R. Martin and Jane Goldman, the new show is set thousands of years before the events of *Game of Thrones* and will explore the darkest secrets of Westeros' history.

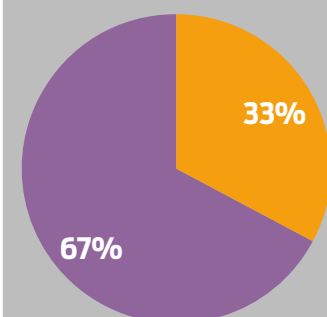
TV horror crosses over

American Horror Story showrunner Ryan Murphy has revealed that this year's story will feature the long-rumoured crossover between the *Murder House* (Season One) and *Coven* (Season Three) storylines. It's also been confirmed that Joan Collins will be joining the cast.

We asked...

Do you still buy films and/or television series on DVD?


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Spielberg geeks out

Ready Player One → Warner Bros. → DVD/Blu-ray/3D Blu-ray/Ultra HD Blu-ray



Why bother blundering around in a VR headset when you can immerse yourself in Steven Spielberg's virtual reality sci-fi smash *Ready Player One* on your home cinema setup instead? The movie, a future-set fantasy packed with pop culture cameos and Easter Eggs, makes its disc debut on August 6 with the 1080p and 4K releases all promising Dolby Atmos sonics, while the UHD platter adds HDR10/Dolby Vision HDR. Extras consist of six *Making of...* featurettes.



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Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the HCC Facebook page

The best *Star Wars* film outside IV, V and VI...



For me, *Rogue One* is the ultimate *Star Wars* movie. *Solo: A Star Wars Story* was a good, fun heist movie. *TFA* was great and *TLJ* was an interesting film that added so much into the lore of the saga. But obviously the whining haters don't like that.

Darran Sykes

Rogue One. More like a *Star Wars* movie than all the others put together since *Return of the Jedi*...

Brian Day

Caravan of Courage.
Kenneth Thomson

I like *Revenge of the Sith*, it's a lot darker than the rest.

Robert Corrigan

What you're watching on your home cinema...



The Revenant for probably the fourth time. I adore this film.

Deji Ayeni

Nothing. I have a new 65in TV being delivered on Sunday!

Brett Gidlow

I feel like a bit of *The Big Lebowski*.

Seán O'Brien

My lad is insisting on *Deep Blue Sea* after seeing *The Meg* trailer. He wants to watch a shark movie!

Fondriest Steve

Dark Tower on UHD Blu-ray and *Detroit* on Blu-ray, of which I have high expectations.

Chris Starr

Lord of the Rings trilogy on new TV and upgraded speakers! Wished it was in 4K and 3D simultaneously!

Theo Coetzee

My usual horror movies...

Troy Chaske

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Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



Checking in today?

Following *Hotel Artemis* (out this month in cinemas) comes another hotel-based Hollywood thriller. *Bad Times at the El Royale* is directed by Drew Goddard and boasts Jeff Bridges and Chris Hemsworth in its ensemble cast. It's out in October; maybe this trailer will persuade you to reserve a room.

youtu.be/SQmOaJciI7Q



VHS fights back. Sort of

HMV is tapping into our love of throwback formats by releasing a collection of 1980s movie classic (*Beverly Hills Cop*, *The Warriors*, *Scarface*, *Top Gun*, *E.T.*, etc) in special edition VHS-style packaging. They're not actual VHS releases, though; they bundle a Blu-ray/DVD double pack with the film poster.

hmv.co/VHSRange



No not *that* Mike Myers

The thought of yet another *Halloween* sequel is perhaps more horrifying than the 1978 original, but this new movie (called *Halloween*, confusingly) brings back Jamie Lee Curtis and seems ready to ignore most of the nonsense of the 1980s and '90s sequels. Don't bother asking when it's out...

youtu.be/ek1ePFp-nBI



A work of wonder

As you'll discover on p24, Team HCC is rather partial to the Wonder Woman theme from *Batman vs Superman* (and *Wonder Woman*). Here's the chance to see it performed live by recording artist and electric cello genius Tina Guo, joined by violinist Caroline Campbell and jets of flame. Awesome.

youtu.be/tZJBBE4TeYk



TOP PICK

Seconds out, round two

The success of *Rocky* spin-off/sequel *Creed* in 2015 meant we were always destined to see Michael B. Jordan's pugilist get back in the ring. This time around, the trailer shows he's going up against someone called Drago. Wonder what that's all about? In cinemas in November.

youtu.be/cPNVNqn4T9I



'I've got thumb ache!'

The Retro Handheld Console harks back to an era when games were all about gameplay rather than variable refresh rates. Available for £18, this battery-powered pocket plaything packs 150 8-bit titles to challenge your manual/mental dexterity. The LCD display is only 1.8in, though, so get squinting.

www.thefowndry.com

Loewe goes larger

Loewe Bild 3.65 → www.loewe.tv



The Bild 3 has been luxury TV company Loewe's entry-level range since it launched late 2016, offering an unusual mix of LCD and OLED displays. At first it peaked at a 55in OLED model, but the new Bild 3.65 is a 65in OLED, giving Loewe fans an even more immersive 4K HDR experience. This £4,200 set supports Dolby Vision, HDR10 and HLG playback, packs a 2 x 40W integrated soundbar (with Bluetooth receiver), and boasts the brand's customary design flourishes.

Altogether now...

Sound United – owner of Denon, Marantz, Polk Audio and more – is promising an expansive, and smart, 2018 product line. **Steve May** reports

IF YOU THOUGHT Marantz was a premium AV brand, you ain't seen nothing yet. And if you're a born-again vinyl junkie, rejoice. Not only is Denon getting back into the turntable business, but it's making phono inputs standard on all its upcoming network-connected AV receivers.

These were just two of my takeaways from Sound United's Summer press conference, wherein some of the biggest AV and hi-fi marques in the world laid out their plans for the year ahead.

For those too busy to follow the corporate breadcrumb trail, Denon and Marantz are now owned by Sound United. They reside in a bulging audio portfolio alongside minimal modernists Definitive Technology, US mainstream speaker seller Polk Audio, Boston Acoustics and the stratospherically expensive Classé. When all conspire to reveal their wares, you have an audio spectacular that makes Bristol Show look like a bake sale.

This year's event, staged in Alicante, was held under the umbrella slogan 'Bring the joy to the world,' and company CEO Kevin Duffy certainly seemed pleased with himself. During his keynote, he painted a rosy future for AV receivers (which have often seemed like an endangered species) and high-performance audio. 'Building our core business – AV receivers, hi-fi, mini systems and speakers – is now the most important thing for us,' he declared. 'We've seen growth in 2016 and 2017, and it'll grow again for us in 2018.' This bravado can only be good news for AV fans.

According to Duffy, we'll all be hearing a lot more of Polk over the coming months. The brand may be numero uno in loudspeakers in the US according to Sound United, but means nothing on this side of the pond. That may all be about to change with the launch of the £350 Command Bar (see p8), which literally has Amazon Alexa built-in, and the Assist, a £180 Google Assistant speaker which can really hold a tune.

A sneak peek at the balance sheets reveals why we're about to see a concerted push behind the brand: Sound United currently earns half its revenues in the Americas, but only thirty per cent in Europe. The disparity is entirely down to speaker sales.

Smart connectivity is possibly the next big thing for the group. Denon's HEOS multiroom system is being quietly reimaged as a multi-purpose IoT platform, and you can expect to see it appear across multiple brands and products – not just AV receivers but also hi-fi and active sound systems.

Denon will continue its 11-channel receiver charge with the AVR-X6500H



'The smart home has been talked about for ten years, but it's only really become a reality over the last three,' says the Sound United chief. 'I don't think anything more exciting has happened than Amazon, Google and Apple deciding that we need to update our homes. They're spending billions of dollars to drive demand. And for the most part they're going to be lower-priced products, because they're highly interested in getting those microphones into homes to help with search and commerce.'

Duffy believes AV enthusiasts are keen to embrace the technology too, and are prepared to pay for the privilege. To prove the point, HEOS will become a standard fixture on all networkable Denon and Marantz home cinema receivers.

Receivers at the ready

No fewer than seven Denon AV receivers were announced in Spain. The 2018 range will feature two non-Atmos AVRs, the AVR-X250BT and the AVR-X550BT, priced at £230 and £300 respectively. Above this duo will sit three Dolby Atmos seven-



The CEOL N10 refreshes the design and spec of Denon's network music system

channel models, the AVR-X1500H, AVR-X2500H and AVR-X3500H, priced at £450, £550 and £900. At the juicier end of the scale, there's a single nine-channel model due September, the £1,500 AVR-X4500H, plus an 11-channel behemoth, the AVC-X6500H, at £2400.

The entire range is getting a cosmetic makeover, adopting the same clean design of the 13-channel AVC-X8500H network amplifier launched at CES in January. This at least gives the range a refreshingly consistent appearance.

Technology bumps to look forward to include eARC on the AVR-X3500H and above, and Amazon Alexa compatibility on the AVR-X1500H upwards.

However, the brand conceded to *HCC* that it wasn't in a position to implement HDMI v2.1 on any AV receiver yet, as chipsets are simply not available. The company hinted that the first models with this 8K-ready interface could appear in 2019, but suggests any practical application would be limited for some time. And only the brand's flagship AVC-X8500H model will be upgradeable to a new HDMI 2.1 board, as and when it becomes available.

Nor is this year's range all about cutting-edge tech. Denon is also making a return to the analogue turntable business, with the gloss-black DP-400 and step-up DP-450USB. The latter offers USB dubbing (to MP3 320kbps or WAV) and comes with a dust cover that rests on the spindle but doubles as an album sleeve holder.

Its popular CEOL network/CD/radio/streaming music system is also getting a redesign with the £450 N10. This flaunts a new scratch-resistant top plate, Alexa voice support (Power On, Volume Control and streaming audio) and internal refinements for sound quality improvements.

A new home for high-end hi-fi

As for Classé (a brand formerly owned by Bowers & Wilkins Group) its range is unequivocally hi-fi orientated. I did, however pick up a sliver of information – there's an AV processor in development, a mouth-watering prospect.

Sound United also confirmed that production of all ultra high-end Classé products will move to Japan, where they'll be manufactured alongside



Covering all bases: Polk's Command Bar supports Alexa, but its Assist (pictured) is a Google speaker

top-of-the-range Marantz and Denon hardware. And Classé has also managed to retain its entire engineering team.

This marque may be at the upper end of the market, but, according to Duffy, Marantz will be closing in as it moves more upmarket in the future. Yet that didn't stop the company announcing an update to its low-cost, slim-line Marantz AVR range with the NR1509 (5.1) and NR1609 (7.1/5.1.2) receivers, now with Alexa voice support, phono stage input and AirPlay 2 functionality.

If you want a full-sized Marantz seven-channel model, there's the incoming SR5013 (£1,000), which will be followed by two nine-channel receivers, the SR6013 and SR7013, priced at £1,250 and £1,750 respectively. This upper tier adds Auro-3D support to Dolby Atmos and DTS:X. Then, for an early Christmas present, Marantz will ship the eleven-channel SR8013, priced at £2,700, and the £1,900 AV7705 multichannel processor.

Of course, to provide all this high-power Dolby Atmos entertainment, you'll need some serious speakers. This, thinks Sound United, is where Definitive Technology comes in. Its BP9000 floorstanders have a forward-focused bipolar array and integrated subwoofer, and work with the matching A90 Dolby-enabled upfiring module ■



Double delight

Marantz's new crown jewels

A particular highlight from Team Marantz at the Sound United summit was the unveiling of its KI Ruby range, comprising SA-KI Ruby CD player with USB DAC, and PM-KI stereo amplifier. This limited edition duo celebrate sound guru Ken Ishiwata's 40th anniversary with the company, and come engraved with his signature. Supply will be limited, but as an incentive pre-orderers can rest assured that paired systems will feature matching serial numbers.

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THE 30 **BEST**

original movie scores of all time!

Team HCC celebrates the film music that stays in the memory long after the credits have rolled. But which score will be ranked greatest of all?

WHETHER IT'S A playful melody or synthetic soundscape, a 70s' funk jam or orchestral epic, a film's score – an integral part of cinema long before dialogue – can make or break a movie to the point where the best ones are often more highly regarded than the film itself.

But which are 'the best'? Naturally, that's a matter of opinion, as there are no hard and fast rules. In this list, we've deliberately cast our net far and wide, encompassing various genres, styles and composers. Some are hummable classics,

others the kind of music that take on a life of their own when combined with lush cinematography.

And choosing our top 30 has been a bittersweet task. We've spent hours listening to some of the finest cinematic music ever created, and then had to discard plenty of it. If we haven't included your personal favourite, we apologise...

So, Hans Zimmer, James Horner, Bernard Herrmann, Ennio Morricone, Lalo Schifrin, Elmer Bernstein, Alan Silvestri, John Williams and more – let's play the music! ➤

30. *Batman vs Superman: Dawn of Justice*

This superhero epic features a score composed by Hollywood heavyweight Hans Zimmer and Dutch DJ/music-maker Junkie XL. Most of it is as dark and brooding as the subject matter, majoring on low-register choral melodies and pounding percussion; raising it up a notch is the thrilling *Is She With You?* that greets Wonder Woman's dramatic arrival. Its electric cello motif (somewhat reminiscent of Led Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song*) instantly becomes the character's calling card – and was used again in *Wonder Woman*.



29. *The Adventures of Robin Hood*

Watching Errol Flynn swinging from trees and dispensing medieval rural justice in this 1938 Technicolor classic is made all the more enjoyable by Erich Wolfgang Korngold's jolly score, which seemingly ranges across the whole orchestra pit to craft a series of inventive cues and themes. Nothing less should be expected of Korngold, of course; a child genius, he'd been famous in his native Austria since his pre-teens as a classical composer.

Listening to his work on *...Robin Hood* now, it's hard not to think, 'They don't make 'em like this anymore.' Possibly because no one these days has quite as much musical talent...



28. *Gremlins*

Jerry Goldsmith deserves his reputation as a cinematic music master, with his film career spanning five decades and including *Planet of the Apes*, *Chinatown*, *Alien* and *L.A. Confidential*. Brought onboard by director Joe Dante for this 1984 flick, he produced a score that perfectly captures the film's mix of comedy, fantasy and genuine horror, blending synthesizers with a traditional orchestra to create some anarchic themes. The wide-eyed wonder of Gizmo is brought to life via a recurring lilting melody; the unfettered lunacy of a hundred killer critters on the rampage is encapsulated by the aptly titled *Too Many Gremlins*. A lesser composer would have played it safe. Goldsmith does this oddball movie full justice.



27. *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

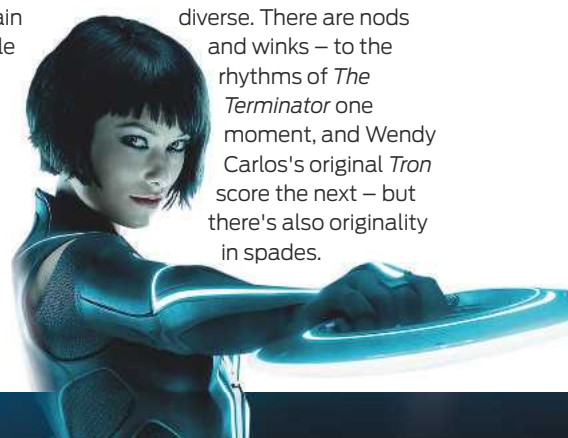
Classical composer Wojciech Kilar may have been scoring movies in his native Poland since the 1960s, but it was his work on Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 horror blockbuster that brought him to the attention of Western film fans – and what an introduction it was. Based around the intertwining and rearranging of three main themes, Kilar's unforgettable score mixes sinister Gothic strings (with occasional explosions of Herrmann-esque horror), strident horns and drums, and haunting choral interludes to conjure up a particularly potent mix of terror, romance and tragedy.



26. *Tron: Legacy*

Daft Punk proved an inspired choice by director Joseph Kosinski for this 2010 sci-fi sequel/reboot. Famously given over a year to cook up their themes and cues, Messrs Bangalter and de Homem-Christo set about mashing up their trademark futuristic Euro-bangers with some orchestral constructions, resulting in a soundtrack that's joyfully

diverse. There are nods and winks – to the rhythms of *The Terminator* one moment, and Wendy Carlos's original *Tron* score the next – but there's also originality in spades.





25. *Vertigo*

Despite a lengthy and successful career stretching from *Citizen Kane* (1941) to *Taxi Driver* (1976), it was Bernard Herrmann's long-running collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock that stands as his most fruitful period, and it's this fourth of the composer's scores for Hitch that towers over everything else he did. As much as this 1958 film finds the director at the top of his mastery of the cinematic art, it's also impossible to think of a sequence from *Vertigo* and not also hear Herrmann's memorable love theme, or the dizzying sonic spirals that perfectly translate the film's title into an audible experience. Cryptic yet lyrical, disturbing yet beautiful, *Vertigo*'s orchestral score is as much of a classic as the movie itself.



24. *Conan the Barbarian*

Directed by gun-lover John Milius and starring former 'Mr. Universe' Arnold Schwarzenegger, this 1982 screen take on Robert E. Howard's pulp adventurer may very well be the most macho film ever made. This feeling is further reinforced by Basil Poledouris's muscular score, which drives the action on with relentless drum beats and blasting horns. Add to that some Middle Eastern flourishes and a dash of romance and it has no difficulty whisking you off to a world of derring-do and high-adventure. Quite simply, Poledouris does for the fantasy genre what John Williams previously did for sci-fi. He would continue in a similar vein, albeit with added industrial textures, with his score for 1987's *RoboCop*.



23. *Godzilla*

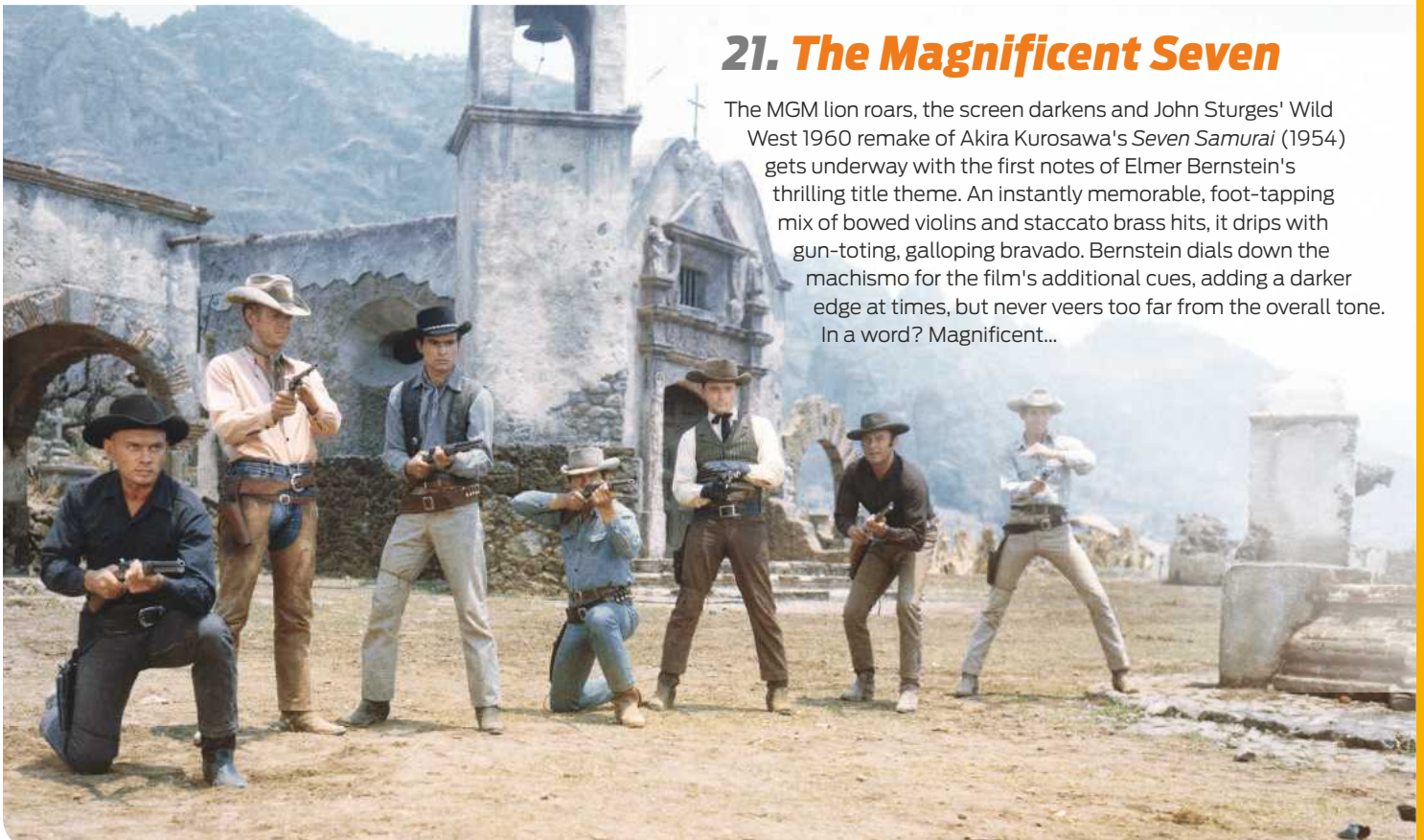
Complex and intricate musical scores are all well and good, but sometimes all that's needed is music that captures the raw, unfettered dynamism of the subject matter. Akira Ifukube's work for the original 1954 *Godzilla* is a brilliant example; the orchestra march he crafted as *Godzilla*'s theme gives the massive monster a sense of unstoppable power that belies its man-in-a-suit origins, while simultaneously underscoring it with a militaristic edge that plays up the film's allegory to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. The two-minute piece *Godzilla Comes Ashore* takes this even further, literally mashing the keys of a piano to highlight the chaos and destruction that follows in the beast's wake.



22. *Predator*

Visually, *Predator* is rather uninspiring – a tapestry of jungle green and earthy brown. Alan Silvestri's score is altogether more exciting, opening with the bravura title theme that plays out as the camera tracks from outer-space to the arrival of Arnold Schwarzenegger's grunts deep in the jungle. Silvestri segues skilfully from eerie, alien-signalling tones to a bombastic military march, giving us a template for what's to come. Later tracks go heavy on dynamic, percussive brass stabs, a suitable accompaniment to the explosive onscreen action.

A legendary score among film music fans, the now out-of-print soundtrack CD sells for upwards of £50. A limited edition vinyl version surfaced last year too.



21. *The Magnificent Seven*

The MGM lion roars, the screen darkens and John Sturges' Wild West 1960 remake of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) gets underway with the first notes of Elmer Bernstein's thrilling title theme. An instantly memorable, foot-tapping mix of bowed violins and staccato brass hits, it drips with gun-toting, galloping bravado. Bernstein dials down the machismo for the film's additional cues, adding a darker edge at times, but never veers too far from the overall tone. In a word? Magnificent...



20. Dunkirk

Partnering director Christopher Nolan's dramatic visuals is this Oscar-nominated score (it lost out to Alexandre Desplat's work on *The Shape of Water*) from Hans Zimmer (and collaborators Ben Wallfisch, Edward Elgar and Lorne Balfe) that's definitely one of his less traditional works. Incorporating the sound of a ticking watch, and Shepard Tone audio trickery (to create the illusion of tones that continually ascend), this is all about the passage of time, and not having enough of it – fitting considering the subject matter.

Nolan's dialogue-light script often puts the score centre-stage; at other times it's an unnerving background presence. There's a gorgeous fidelity to the whole suite too.



19. Super Fly

Following in the footsteps of his father, whose film *Shaft* had been a huge hit the previous year, 1972 saw Gordon Parks Jr.'s *Super Fly* explode into US cinemas. The story of a New York cocaine dealer looking to make the one big score that will allow him to retire, the film is an entertaining piece of blaxploitation, but its real legacy comes from Curtis Mayfield's astonishingly funky soundtrack. No mere collection of songs, Mayfield's insightful and poetic lyrics tell their own story; one that parallels that of the film only with a far stronger anti-drug message. From the conga-inflected highs of *Pusherman* to the more rueful *Freddie's Dead*, it's a remarkably cohesive soundtrack that also happens to be a powerful piece of social commentary.



18. Forbidden Planet

If the early 1950s taught film fans anything, it was that the future would sound just like a theremin. This unusual instrument had become the *de facto* sound of science-fiction cinema in the early part of the decade. But that wasn't good enough for MGM producer Dore Schary, who hired pioneering electronic musicians Bebe and Louis Barron to score 1956's *Forbidden Planet*.

The 'electronic tonalities' they created for the movie were unlike anything audiences had heard before; the strange bleeps, hums, bumbles and whirrs blurring the distinction between music and sound effects, creating an alien soundscape that dovetailed with the unearthly Eastman Color visuals. Groundbreaking stuff.



17. The Great Escape

A second entry for Elmer Bernstein (again working for director John Sturges), this major-key composition, complete with its infectious whistling, imbues the 1963 prisoner-of-war drama with an upbeat sensibility that counters the serious nature of the subject matter (the fact that many of the escapees end up getting shot dead is often forgotten). It's therefore easy to see as an odd choice, but *The Great Escape* above all is a film about hope and the human spirit (witness Steve McQueen's final baseball-throwing scene), something that's brought to the fore by Bernstein's jaunty melody. There are other more atmospheric themes on the soundtrack, of course, but the main title is the one that sticks in the memory.

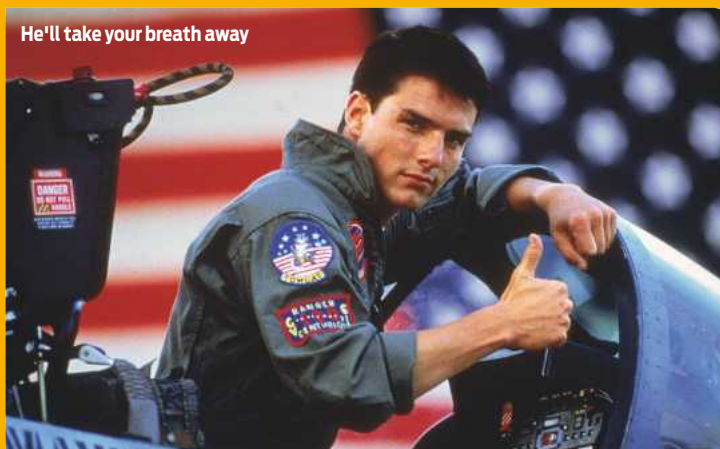
The 1980s: when movie scores embraced the music

Celebrating a decade of sing-along soundtracks from *Highlander* to *Dirty Dancing* (with a bit of *Dirty Harry*)

The 1980s – an era of astonishing film scores – is heavily represented in our top 30. Yet away from the original compositions of the likes of Alan Silvestri and James Horner, the decade is also noteworthy for the pop and rock songs from world-famous artists that littered the soundtracks of some of its biggest movies.

The birth of the music video and MTV gave studios a new avenue to market their movie. A chart-topping song, with a video intertwined with scenes from the film, could act as a persistent trailer, providing 24-hour promotion – especially if the track could somehow be incorporated into the film.

1986's *Highlander* is an example, combining its traditional score (by Michael Kamen) with a series of songs from rock act Queen (including *Who Wants to Live Forever*), while *Top*



Gun packed its soundtrack with songs from Kenny Loggins (*Danger Zone*, *Playing With the Boys*) and Berlin (*Take My Breath Away*). Harold Faltermeyer's instrumental tune *Axel F* topped the charts with a video featuring *Beverly Hills Cop* clips; William Friedkin roped in British New Wave Wang Chung to score *To Live and Die in L.A.*; and 1960s-set drama *Dirty Dancing* added the modern (*I've Had*) *The Time of My Life* to its roster of rhythm 'n' blues classics and scored a worldwide hit. Although the concept looked in danger of overstaying its welcome when Guns N' Roses' *Welcome to the Jungle* adorned *The Dead Pool* soundtrack and the band cameo'd in the film, by the 1990s the studios had it down to a fine art: soundtrack songs for *Ghost*, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and *Armageddon* all spent longer in the charts than the films did at cinemas.



16. *The Fog*

John Carpenter, writer and director of some of the best genre films of the '70s and '80s, is also an accomplished musician who scored the majority of his own movies. And standing clear from a body of remarkable scores for the likes of *Halloween* (1978) and *Escape from New York* (1981), is his composition for *The Fog* (1980).

Right from the off, Carpenter's pared-down music sinks its hooks into you; a delicate piano/synthesizer refrain rams home the ghostly nature of the narrative and hints at the sadness behind the curse. This theme is returned to again and again, each time adding something more dynamic as the tension in the story builds and the titular fog claims more victims. Deliciously spooky.



15. *Candyman*

If Hollywood ever gets around to remaking *Candyman* you just know that the studio will play up the whole 'urban horror' angle by loading the soundtrack with a grab bag of hip-hop and rap artists, interspersed with sudden jump-scare stings. Thankfully, director Bernard Rose went down a very different route for his 1992 bigscreen adaptation of Clive Barker's short story *The Forbidden*, hiring minimalist composer Philip Glass to score the film. Working almost exclusively with an organ and choir (a piano also features on a couple of the tracks), the stripped-back result is something that seems at once modern and old – a new kind of urban Gothic, if you will – mixed with elements of a lullaby that hark back to the story's roots in urban legends.



14. *The Bride of Frankenstein*

'It's a perfect night for mystery and horror. The air itself is filled with monsters.' So says Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley in the prologue to James Whale's 1935 sequel. While it's a fine setup for the film, she could just as easily have been talking about Franz Waxman's Wagnerian score, which fills the air with all manner of horrors, from the five-note motif of Frankenstein's original creation, to the more discordant three-note cue of the newly-created Bride and the darker theme that accompanies the sinister Dr. Pretorius. Yet what really makes Waxman's score stand out from the horror crowd are the playful moments where it embraces the camp humour of Whale's masterpiece.



13. *Blade Runner*

Director Ridley Scott moved away from the typical Hollywood score for *Alien* in 1977, and then went further off-piste with this 1982 cult sci-fi/noir. Greek electronic noodler Vangelis was tasked with writing the themes that would marry with Scott's visually arresting, futuristic flick, and delivered a suite of undulating synthetic soundscapes with minimalist percussion – the effect is that watching Scott's movie becomes an almost dreamlike



experience. Loved by musos, when the soundtrack CD was finally released in 1994 it reached no. 20 in the UK album charts.

12. *Sicario*

Johan Johansson's industrial-tinged score for Denis Villeneuve's war-on-drugs thriller accounts for so much of the movie's sense of menace it's impossible to imagine any other type of track in its place. Standout theme *The Beast* is a fine example – a brooding concoction of crashing percussion and deep, repetitive string notes that reaches a soundscape-filling crescendo. Johansson introduces subtle variations for subsequent scenes, all the while sticking close to this terrifying mood-board. For a movie that relies so heavily on creating audience tension, this score is pitch-perfect.





11. Braveheart

Braveheart (1995) is one of composer James Horner's best-known works from a long career that took in everything from James Cameron mega-hits (*Avatar*) to 1980s actioners (*Commando*); ignore the use of Irish uilleann bagpipes to soundtrack a film set in Scotland and instead let this score's wistful melodies wash over you. *For The Love of a Princess* is without doubt its most famous track, a lilting, plaintive tune that's born to partner Mel Gibson's passion piece (and, oddly, has been adopted by techno DJs for various remixes). However, Horner's battle sequence themes, where timpani rhythms preface the impending slaughter, are equally accomplished. Oscar-nominated, and rightly so.



10. Batman



Tim Burton chose to kick off his 1989 blockbuster not with an action-packed set-piece, but with his camera roaming shadowy alleyways that transpire to be the Bat logo, giving the audience nothing much to do but marvel at the brilliance of Danny Elfman's accompanying score. Elfman, a long-time Burton associate, plants brass, string and woodwind phrases against snare rolls and cymbal crashes, the title theme varying its tempo before reaching a triumphant climax (which, unless we're imagining it, pays very slight homage to the soundtrack of the 1960s TV series). Unlike the clean-cut melody of Superman's theme, this composition sounds both heroic *and* dark – a combination that suits the Caped Crusader down to the ground.



09. Enter The Dragon

Lalo Schifrin's recognisable film scores seem to dominate the 1960s and early '70s. The Argentine-American brought his jazzy percussive sensibilities to the likes of *Mission Impossible*, *Bullitt* and *Dirty Harry*, and hit peak form with the impressively funky and off-the-wall soundtrack for the 1973 Bruce Lee vehicle *Enter the Dragon*. Schifrin's main title teams fast-paced bass, wah-wah guitars, triumphant horns and synthesizers with Lee's Jeet Kune Do attack cries, while other pieces throw Eastern influences into the mix. It's a shame there's only 26 minutes of music to savour here, as we'd happily listen to more. It's also a shame that Schifrin's particular style fell out of favour in Hollywood quite quickly.



08. Requiem for a Dream

Even if you've never seen Darren Aronofsky's immensely downbeat drug addiction drama (2000), you've most likely heard some of its score – track *Lux Aeterna* is an epic-sounding, swelling string composition that's since been pilfered by, among others, Sky Sports, *The X-Factor*, and the trailer for *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. All of which surely makes its composer Clint Mansell (once of post-punk band Pop Will Eat Itself) massively rich. It's re-use isn't surprising, however. Mansell's layered track, by virtue of some incessant repetition, is the sort that lodges in your brain and, when put to images, seems to add an air of intense drama to whatever your watching (Aronofsky memorably uses it for the film's closing montage). The likes of the *Saw* theme (2004) and Max Richter's *On the Nature of Daylight* (featured in *Arrival* in 2016), appear inspired by Mansell's work here.

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07. *The Terminator*

Brad Fiedel's synth-laden soundtrack absolutely nails the brief set by James Cameron's sci-fi B-movie – what better for a film about a metal-cored killing machine than a clanking, lumbering industrial score, which, away from the now-iconic rat-a-tat rhythms, has a sumptuous, steely melody to set your spine tingling. Cameron, knowing when he's on to a good thing, had Fiedel rework the score for *T2: Judgment Day* – although, as *Film Score Monthly* reported in 2013, the composer seized the opportunity to tweak its time signature. Primitive looping techniques had resulted in the 1984 original (which wasn't written as sheet music) being slightly out of time. Which, considering the time-travel plot, is rather apt.



06. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*

Unlike the vast majority of the films in our list, Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) isn't entirely scored by music written specifically for it, instead mixing Australian composer Bruce Smeaton's original pieces (including the wonderfully melancholy piano theme *The Ascent*) with a selection of pre-existing classical and folk compositions expertly deployed to add weight to the narrative. The most memorable of the latter are two Romanian panpipe pieces – *Doina: Sus Pe Culmea Dealului* and *Doina Lui Petru Unc*, performed by Gheorghe Zamfir and Marcel Cellier – that effortlessly set up an ominous, ethereal space for Weir's haunting film to inhabit.

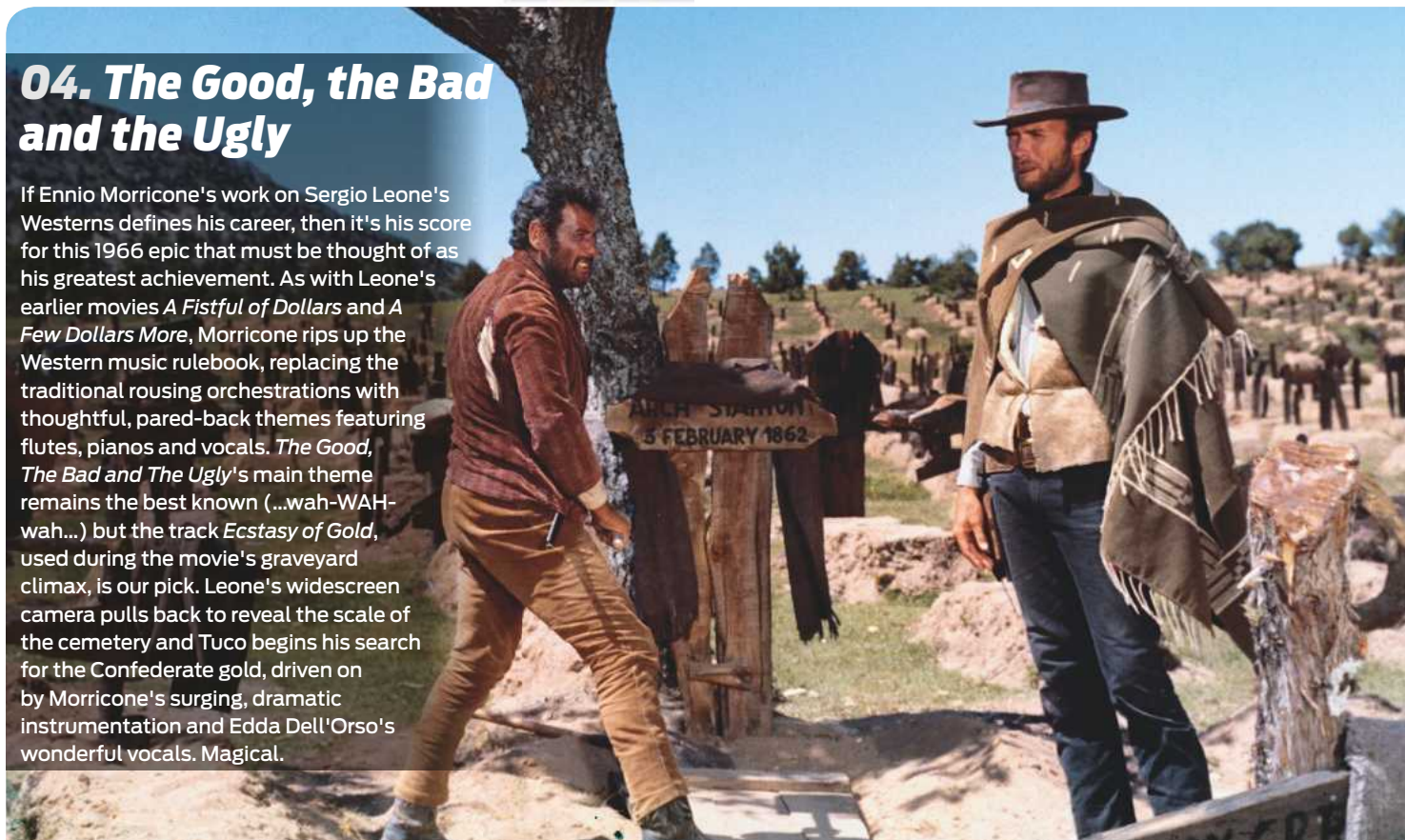


05. *Suspiria*

Dario Argento conceived his 1977 supernatural horror as an assault on the senses – and the music score by Italian prog-rockers Goblin certainly fits the bill. An audacious and experimental assemblage of discordant synths, jangling percussion, guttural screams ('Witch!') and various unusual instruments (including Indian tabla drums and a Greek bouzouki), Goblin's *avant-garde* musical soundscape doesn't so much invite you into the film's nightmarish world of witchcraft, as beat you over the head and drag you in against your will. Like the film itself, the soundtrack is built all around extremes – and because of this it remains an unsettlingly powerful and terrifying experience when played in isolation. Shocking stuff.

04. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*

If Ennio Morricone's work on Sergio Leone's Westerns defines his career, then it's his score for this 1966 epic that must be thought of as his greatest achievement. As with Leone's earlier movies *A Fistful of Dollars* and *A Few Dollars More*, Morricone rips up the Western music rulebook, replacing the traditional rousing orchestrations with thoughtful, pared-back themes featuring flutes, pianos and vocals. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*'s main theme remains the best known (...wah-WAH-wah...) but the track *Ecstasy of Gold*, used during the movie's graveyard climax, is our pick. Leone's widescreen camera pulls back to reveal the scale of the cemetery and Tuco begins his search for the Confederate gold, driven on by Morricone's surging, dramatic instrumentation and Edda Dell'Orso's wonderful vocals. Magical.





3. *Jaws*

Arguably the most famous film score of them all, with John Williams' two-note theme now a pop culture phenomenon ripped off and reappropriated countless times. As most of us know, Spielberg's troubled production was in desperate need of it too. Practical effects problems had led to the shark being almost excised from its own movie; Williams' relentless theme takes on much of *Jaws*' heavy-lifting when it comes to tension and terror.

There's much more to the overall score, however. Away from the chomping *carcharodon carcharias*, this 1975 smash is a boys' own adventure yarn, replete with drunken sailors and sea-borne banter. Playful, symphonic tracks such as *Out to Sea* and *One Barrel Chase* cast the audience adrift on the New England coastline. You can practically feel the salt-spray lashing your skin and the wind in your hair.

But is it Williams' seminal work? Not quite...



2. *Back to the Future*

This 1985 time-travel classic may end with Huey Lewis and the News' *Back in Time* over the end credits, but by the time you get that far Alan Silvestri's orchestral compositions have wormed into your brain and will never leave. As with his work on *Predator*, this is mainly built around dynamic brass hits, punchy piano notes and percussion,

but with an ear-worm of a refrain that's chopped and retooled throughout the movie, sometimes to accompany the euphoric set-pieces (the clocktower lightning strike sequence being an obvious showstopper), other times to signal moments of danger. And then there's that twinkly glockenspiel motif – a mere second of music that sets *BTF* fans' senses tingling. You might need a time machine to pick this up on CD though, as the 2009 Intrada release is out of print.



1. *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

There's a certain immediate thrill that comes from watching *Star Wars*, and it's John Williams' opening fanfare that accompanies the disappearing text crawl – regardless of whether it borrows heavily from Erich Wolfgang Korngold's theme for 1942 drama *Kings Row*. From this launchpad, Williams lays on woodwind melodies (*Princess Leia's Theme*, *Ben's Death...*) to endow George Lucas's 'space opera' with gut-wrenching emotion. The entire 74-minute soundtrack is nothing short of a masterclass, delivered by the skilled musicians of the London Symphony Orchestra.

So why specifically pick *Empire Strikes Back*? Because for this 1980 sequel, Williams pulled something special out of the bag in the form of *The Imperial March*, a malevolent, hair-raising theme that gives series villain Darth Vader the calling card he always deserved, and makes his third act revelation ('I am your father...') all that more horrific ■



Double vision

Daniel Sait takes a tour of an award-winning multi-purpose media room where the owners have a tricky screen choice to make



KIT CHECKLIST

SCREEN EXCELLENCE: 120in 16:9 motorised recessed projector screen

JVC: DLA-X9500 4K HDR-compatible projector

FUTURE AUTOMATION: PD2.5 projector lift

ANTHEM: MRX 720 AV receiver

ARTCOUSTIC: 2 x SL12-6s (L/R); SL HSPL (centre);

2 x SL4-2s (surround); 2 x Architect 2-1s (height);

2 x PS-2 subwoofers, including power amps

SONY: 75in 4K LED TV

ELAN: GSC2 control processor; HR200 remote

QMOTION: Custom blinds for patio doors/window

APPLE: Apple TV 4K

NINTENDO: Switch games console

SONY: PlayStation 4

SKY: Sky+HD (since upgraded to Sky Q)



THIS MEDIA DEN from Essex-based installer iCubed Home Cinema, awarded Best Home Cinema at the 2018 Smart Building Awards, is known as the Oakwood Manor Multiplex. As Iain Martin of iCubed says: 'Our client loved his system and commented that as he has two screens, it's technically a multiplex. Who are we to argue?'

The brief here was for a high-quality system in a lounge, a multi-purpose space for enjoying everyday TV and, when required, movies and sporting events as cinematically as possible.

'We discussed the option of a 4K TV with a drop-down projector screen,' explains Martin. 'The client at this point showed interest but needed to be inspired.' 3D visualisations were duly undertaken, also ensuring correct angles/distances could be adhered to. A 120in projector screen from Screen Excellence was deemed perfect for the 5m viewing distance and room height. Artcoustic speakers were installed at 24 degrees from the seating position to be in line with Dolby specifications, and centred between wall and the screen. Additional speakers from the brand complete the 5.2.2 Atmos setup, including an SL HSPL soundbar as centre speaker.

For the all-important bigscreen images, a JVC DLA-X9500 drops into action on a Future Automation lift, fed content from Sky Q, Apple TV and games consoles. All sources are quickly accessible from the front-of-house custom-made cabinetry, designed to be an aesthetic match to the PJ screen ■

A. Largescale second screen

Daytime/casual viewing is taken care of by this 75in Sony 4K LED TV

B. Box clever

This custom-made cabinet houses the dual Artcoustic PS-2 subwoofers and centre channel. The fabric doors are acoustically transparent

C. Light touch

A 120in screen drops down from the ceiling at the same time the room's QMotion blinds close to hide the front and rear windows





D. Level up!

The room's Anthem receiver is rated at over 100W per channel, offering plenty of headroom and easily reaching the target of 105dB at the listening position thanks to the speakers' high sensitivity

E. Sound all around

The on-wall and in-ceiling Artcoustic speakers deliver a discreet Dolby Atmos setup

F. Ready for action

The Future Automation lift descends to reveal a JVC DLA-X9500 projector that has already switched on and warmed up. One-button activation comes via an Elan controller, linked to a handset and the owners' iPad

G. What to watch?

With the room needing to cater to a family with young children, entertainment-on-demand was part of the brief. In came a Sky box, Apple TV streamer, PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch





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Photo: Musical Images installation

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The best of CES

This US custom theatre is perhaps proof that they really do things bigger across the pond, says **Mark Craven**

FOR THIS OPULENT, monster-sized home cinema we head over the Atlantic to Salt Lake City and the winner of the Consumer Technology Association's 'Home Theater of the Year' award at the 2018 CES. This basement space rips up the rulebook by having no rear wall – the multiseat cinema instead merges into a bar/games area. Such an approach, says the installer Tym Homes, created lighting and audio challenges.

On the AV side, the cinema features a 7.1.4 Dolby Atmos speaker system assembled from Paradigm's premium CI Elite range, with additional wiring in place for extra subwoofers. Power and processing is delivered by Anthem hardware. Naturally, the projector is a 4K HDR model. For the screen, a 198in Draper Clarion was chosen, with its 2.35:1 aspect ratio making the most of the cinema's wide front wall.

Rubbing shoulders with all this high-end kit and custom design is a bargain-priced Amazon Echo Dot for voice control... ■



KIT CHECKLIST

DRAPER: 198in Clarion 2.35:1 acoustically transparent screen
SONY: 4K/HDR projector
PARADIGM: 71.4 Dolby Atmos/DTS:X speaker system (CI Elite range)
ANTHEM: AV receiver
SONY: 4K Blu-ray player
KALEIDESCAPE: Strato 4K HDR movie server
ROKU: 4K media player
DISH: 4K TV receiver
TYM HOMES: Custom star ceiling/mural
SAVANT: Pro remote; app
AMAZON: Echo Dot for voice control (integrated with Savant system)

A. Overcast conditions

The four-section star ceiling is a bespoke design, and blends fibre optic lighting with a cloud-themed mural

B. Secret sonics

The cinema's 71.4 speaker system is fitted in-wall and in-ceiling – the Atmos overheads are buried in the ceiling coffer

C. Wide wonder

Opting for a 2.35:1 projector screen makes great use of the room's width (7m) and helps maintain line-of-sight to the rear seats



Extensive preparations included stud work to the basement's walls, floor and ceiling. The installer lurking in this pic gives a sense of the room's size



Rather than using a flat front wall, Tym Homes tapered it in, providing a perfect space to fit the projector screen



D. Come and see

This cinema threw its doors open for Salt Lake City's two-week 'Parade of Homes'. Tym Homes staffers were on site to give guests a demo and answer questions

E. One-touch access

The Savant Pro remote provides easy control over the cinema room's sources, with icons set up for Blu-ray playback, the system's Roku player, and its Kaleidescape Strato server

F. Singing the Anthem

DTS:X and Dolby Atmos processing (plus room EQ) come via this Anthem MRX 1120 receiver

G. Pull up a pew

At the back of the room is an entertainment area with pool table and bar. Anyone choosing to grab a mid-movie drink can still keep an eye on the action, though





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Bring on the wall!

ATC thinks bigger with its on-wall HTS40 speakers, here on LCR duty in a premium 7.1 array. Do these space-saving designs have the audio chops to blow us away with Blu-ray sound? See p46

HCC RATINGS KEY...	
Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

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**MAN VS
MONSTER**

*Pacific Rim:
Uprising delivers
big AV thrills on
Blu-ray p92*

With Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos support, Sony's 2018 OLED TV is taking the fight to LG, says **Steve May**

Conservative and classy

A year or so ago, Sony reimagined the humble telly with its A1 OLED debut. The adoption of OLED display tech enabled its engineers to completely rethink TV audio; by adding vibrating actuators to the back of the set, the panel itself could generate sound. The A1 also used a chic lean-back design, and adapted image processing techniques first seen on the spectacular ZD9 LED LCD TV. The result was a humdinger of a 4K set.

Now with the AF8, it's reined in the bravado in favour of a more conventional form factor. Which is the real Sony? Design anarchist or tech conservative? Sometimes it's difficult to tell.

Available in 55in and 65in screen sizes (the latter tested here), this more accommodating design should at least prove easier to park on AV furniture and trendy flat-pack benches. And as the AF8 arrives while the A1 is still on sale (although we suspect a replacement is imminent), and is priced to match, it presents buyers with an interesting conundrum.

Simple sophistication

The lean-back look may have gone, but there's still something artisan about the AF8. Ostensibly little more than a wafer-thin OLED panel with an electronic backpack, its simplicity belies the sophistication of both its design and construction. There's barely a rim to the glass or an air gap between panel and stand – the screen sits snugly on a single, slender foot.

If you want to wall-mount, there's 31mm less distance between the mount and the front of the TV than the A1. For those aiming to hang it flush, the biggest challenge will be placing the power plug.

Overall, the cosmetic design is so minimalist you probably won't even spot the Bravia branding hiding at the bottom left of the bezel.

Only two of the TV's four HDCP 2.2-ready 4K HDMI inputs support full-fat 4K 60p at 4:2:0, or 10-bit at 4:4:4 and 4:2:2. This could potentially prove an annoying limitation. Other connections include a trio of USBs (one for HDD recording), an AV minijack, headphone socket (for those that don't have Bluetooth cans), optical digital audio output and Ethernet. Wi-Fi and Bluetooth are standard. All these ports hide behind snap-on panels,

which give the set a clean, unfussy look. There's a choice of either terrestrial or satellite tuners.

The AF8 comes with the familiar Sony soft-button remote control, with integrated microphone and hot buttons for Netflix and Google Play. There's nothing particularly fancy here.

There's no Freeview Play on the KD-65AF8 either, but much of the same functionality is available on the set's YouView app, which sits atop Freeview. Streaming services include Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Google Play, YouTube, DisneyLife, Rakuten TV and Spotify.

The smart interface remains unchanged from the Sony A1. The set currently uses Android TV OS 7.0, and while it boasts a comprehensive feature set, with integrated Chromecast and Google Assistant control, the platform still runs on square wheels. Both LG and Samsung are ahead in the ease-of-use stakes.

Sony synergy

The AF8 employs the same X1 Extreme image chipset found on its predecessor, and image quality is similarly fine. The synergy between Sony's panel and processing is near perfect. The company says it carries out deep pre-calibration of its OLED screens as part of the manufacturing process, aping production techniques applied to its (stratospherically expensive) Trimaster Studio OLED monitors. There's no question that the end result looks sensational straight from the box, with fine detail performance, aided by 4K X-Reality PRO and dual-database processing, class-leading.

For those that want it, there's still a fair amount of tweaking on offer. In amongst the picture settings is an Advanced Contrast Enhancer (which I kept on Medium) and a Peak Luminance adjuster, which for this audition was mainly set on Medium for SDR playback.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
65in OLED TV with Dolby Vision/Dolby Atmos decoding

POSITION:
Second-tier OLED screen, positioned under the A1

PEERS:
LG OLED65C8;
Panasonic 65FZ950

1. The AF8 joins the 2017 A1 in Sony's current OLED TV line

2. Sony's remote is unadventurous, but easy to use



3



Root around and you'll also discover the Light Sensor, although this is generally best switched off for a more consistent brightness performance. There's also the usual plethora of image presets on offer, including Vivid, Standard, Custom, Cinema Pro, Cinema Home, Sports, Animation and Game.

The AF8's HDR support covers HDR10, HLG and Dolby Vision. The latter is a bit of a curate's egg. The TV happily presents Dolby Vision via its in-built Netflix app, but not necessarily from external sources. The set requires bespoke compatibility with any Dolby Vision-capable playback device in order to work; it's not plug 'n' play.

HDR performance is spot on for a 2018 OLED. It averages just under 800 nits, but can peak as high as 900 nits when measured with a five per cent window and Peak Luminance set high. This intensity diminishes when the HDR window is enlarged, but given that most spectral highlights are generally much smaller and occur fleetingly, the set can certainly dazzle when it needs to. (One of the cute characteristics of the X1 Extreme chipset is that it can be tailored to match any partnered panel; dynamic tone mapping for HDR can precisely follow the TV's ability to display brightness and colour).

Perhaps more importantly, black level performance is first-rate. The AF8 obviously goes perfectly dark, but it preserves low-level shadow detail too. Native 4K detail is presented with extreme clarity, and the set's Triluminos wide colour performance is mouth-watering. My go-to *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* 4K platter is a feast of bright primaries and well-constructed blends.

The set's dynamics are emphasised by *Anon* (Sky Cinema UHD). The movie, which embraces high-contrast cinematography, looks sharp enough to cut diamonds. Monochrome suits, grey concrete walls and copious blacks are given almost three-dimensional depth by this OLED. The Augmented Reality text, used throughout the movie, appears beautifully crisp. It's tempting to still-frame every few minutes just to read the onscreen notes.

With everyday SDR material the AF8 is sublime. Utilising the panel's inherent dynamics, Sony's bespoke

4



Object Based HDR Remastering trickery offers a convincing lift to most content, without seeming forced or unnatural. It's much better in this regard than, say, LG's HDR Effect processing.

Setting the scene

My two most visited image presets proved to be Standard, which offers a pleasing overall APL (Average Picture Level) and Cinema Home, which gives a convincing cinematic 4K presentation. I also rather like the set's Vivid mode, albeit

'Sony's X1 Extreme picture processing for non-4K and standard dynamic range sources is peerless'

with a modicum of control implemented. It certainly adds impact to SDR content. Brightness and contrast are maxed out, while Black Adjust, Advanced Contrast Enhancer and Peak Luminance are on High. Edge colour down to 50 on the fuel gauge, and sharpness down to 30-ish, and the image doesn't look over saturated or cranked.

Sony's Motionflow XR motion handling is impressive too. If you want to maintain maximum detail in fast-moving sports, opt for Smooth or Custom (with Smoothness on 3, Clearness on Low). These modes preserve clarity and smooth out horizontal pans. For movies, select True Cinema if you want to avoid icy interpolation effects.

For the most part, the AF8 knocks all the requisites out of the park. But there is a caveat. Gaming performance lags behind (pun intended) rivals. Using the Standard picture preset, lag is high at 101.5ms. Switching to the dedicated Game mode drops this to 47.2ms. To be honest, the TV didn't feel laggy in this mode when playing *Fortnite*, but I would certainly expect a gaming performance of 30ms or less, something that LG, Panasonic and Samsung have all achieved. Sony should really find a way to shave time off that tardy performance.

The set's innovative Acoustic Surface Technology works just as well here as it did on its predecessor. Stereo imaging is pronounced, with overt panning around the image; audio is perfectly attached to onscreen action, and there's no

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; Dolby Vision **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; optical digital audio output; AV minijack input; Ethernet; headphone output; subwoofer pre-out **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 50W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,447(w) x 836(h) x 55(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 24.4kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; Chromecast Built-in; Bluetooth headphone support; USB/network multimedia playback; Android OS; Triluminos display; X1 Extreme processor with 4K X-Reality PRO; Object Based HDR Remaster; Motionflow XR; Acoustic Surface audio with Atmos bitstream support; screen mirroring

PARTNER WITH



SONY UBP-X700: Now selling for around £200, Sony's relatively compact 4K spinner already looked like a bargain before its Dolby Vision update landed at the end of May. Responsive menus, SACD playback and excellent AV performance.

shortage of volume. For the AF8 there are two rear-panel bass drivers, rather than the single unit that was built into the A1's stand, but they work in tandem, effectively acting as one. This TV can grumble down to around 31.5Hz, with no subwoofer required. Acoustic Surface Technology sounds better than any have a right to expect.

The set can also handle Dolby Atmos audio delivered in a Dolby Digital+ container. This means it'll play Dolby Atmos-encoded content on the TV's Netflix app and recognise an Atmos stream from an external source, such as a Sky Q box. While the TV's sonic system is stereophonic, and doesn't actually do anything Atmos-pheric, you can route the bitstream out over HDMI to a Dolby Atmos-enabled AV receiver for immersive audio.

A cut above

Whatever way you cut it, the KD-65AF8 is a superior OLED 4K flatscreen. If you're wondering if you should spring for this or last year's A1, let your decision be swayed by cosmetics, as there's general parity in image performance between the two models. I personally prefer the slightly more conventional design of this year's AF8, and the finish is still a cut above the competition.

There are niggles. Full-fat UHD HDMI provision is limited and that gaming performance is eclipsed by rivals. However, when it comes to raw picture performance, the AF8 deserves to be on the front row of the grid, and the sound conjured by Acoustic Surface Technology is crisp and prodigious, with those twin rear woofers seamlessly integrated with the actuators, filling out the bottom end.

A recent Dolby Atmos/Dolby Vision firmware update puts it on a level playing field with rival LG OLED screens, while Sony's picture processing for non-4K and SDR sources is peerless ■

3. To give SDR material a polish, the TV offers Object Based HDR Remaster processing

4. Sony's ultra-thin panel attaches to a bulkier back section

5. Dual bass drivers are tucked into the AF8's rear chassis

5



HCC VERDICT



Sony KD-65AF8

→ £3,200 → www.sony.co.uk

WE SAY: This neatly designed, high-performance OLED TV is gorgeous to look at and doesn't need a 'bar to sound good. Now if only Sony would sort out its Game mode...

Having loved the smaller speakers in ATC's HTS on-wall range, **Ed Selley** demanded we let him check out their bigger brothers

Space-saving super sonics



If you ask me, on-wall speakers should be a great deal more popular than they actually are – having a sound system that takes up no floor space is surely desirable. Yet they are often seen as lifestyle items that play second fiddle to more conventional designs. The package here is a rather determined riposte to that idea.

The company responsible, ATC, isn't in the business of making speakers purely for their cosmetic qualities, and its HTS on-wall models are closely related to their floorstanding/standmount siblings.

We've already auditioned an array using the smallest HTS7 on-walls [see HCC #275] but this setup is rather more serious. The £1,950 (each) HTS40 is the flagship of the range, a three-way design based on the highly regarded

SCM40 floorstander. The '40' value refers to its cabinet volume of forty litres. In fairness, this does make it a rather big speaker for something you are supposed to hang on a wall – 74cm tall and 15cm deep to be precise.

The HTS40 has a feature that puts it in a small subset of speakers

of any type, and one that offers some huge performance possibilities. As well as a 1in soft dome tweeter and 6.5in bass unit, the front baffle sports a 3in soft dome (as opposed to a more typical cone) midrange driver. These are extremely difficult and expensive to make, but promise a more robust midrange performance and are something of an ATC speciality. This dome is also present on the HTS40C, which is the same speaker arranged for horizontal centre channel placement.

The HTS11 (£475 each) that serves as the rear four speakers in this 7.1 setup is a more typical two-way design but still makes use of entirely bespoke drivers and shares a tweeter with the HTS40.

All the HTS Series models have been designed taking into account their on-wall placement. This means that despite their sealed cabinets, they offer an impressive frequency response, with the HTS40s rated down to near 30Hz. Like all ATC speakers, however, they will do their best work with some power behind them. They're not massively sensitive or efficient, and ATC suggested to me a target figure of 100W per channel.

The partnering C1 subwoofer (£1,500) is ATC's go-to bass maker for both the HTS product line and the SCM range of speakers. The ingredients are pretty typical enough; a 12in doped paper driver powered by a 200W Class AB amplifier (which is also all ATC's own work), but there are some useful nods to modernity. User operation is menu-driven from the front of the unit rather than peering at the back panel over the top (where you'll find just line-level and speaker-level inputs), and the sealed, down-firing design makes placement a simple business.

Given the size of the HTS40, this is never going to be a speaker that vanishes into a room but when you consider the floorspace that the related floorstander needs, it's still an attractive proposition. The HTS11 is rather more discreet and is the sort of thing that should work in any room.

The overall level of build and finish of the HTS Series is extremely good. These aren't 'showy' speakers but the care and engineering that has gone into them is evident wherever you look. As noted when I reviewed the HTS7s, ATC's white grille doesn't do a perfect job of covering the black drivers, but this isn't the end of the world.

Powered up

Connected to an Anthem MRX 720 bolstered by three of ATC's own P1 power amplifiers, giving the HTS40s the power they need to really shine, the results are impressive from the off – as I'd expect from a £9,000 system.

If you are looking for an instant calling card of that dome midrange then you might be disappointed, but settle in for a listen and you'll start to realise that this system's LCR stage has a whip-smart ability to find details in a mix that can leave rivals standing around looking glum. When K enters Sapper Morton's apartment in *Blade Runner 2049* (Blu-ray), the various Foley effects amid the near silence of the room are beautifully conveyed. The squeak of

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
7.1-channel on-wall speaker system

POSITION:
On-wall iterations of ATC's SCM range

PEERS:
Artcoustic SL Series; M&K MP150 Mk II; DALI Phantom range



1. The centre speaker is identical to the HTS40, but horizontal

floorboards and the bubbling of the pot on the stove are perfectly placed and worked into the mix. They don't leap out at you because they sound absolutely and unambiguously right.

The commonality of drivers across the front three speakers also makes for a beautifully cohesive soundstage. There is simply no clue as to where one speaker's activity ends and another begins. A good turn of the volume dial helps their performance expand in scale, but even at low levels the listening experience is wonderfully immersive.

The integration from top to bottom is no less impressive. The C1 subwoofer adds to the weight of the presentation in an utterly seamless way. You really only appreciate how much it is doing when you it off. There are subwoofers you can buy for the same price that can hit harder than the C1 (and have a little more design flair), but not many of them offer the same blend of speed and subtlety at the same time.

War machines

Up next is *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Blu-ray), as I wanted to see how this system would cope with material that's a bit more boisterous. The good news is that it doesn't bat an eyelid – no rough edge or tightening up – during the escape of the War Rig from the bikers and Immortan Joe's splendid monster truck. The speakers find and reconcile the most intricate of details without harming the overall sense of fury and impact that the film requires; something that the ATCs do in a way that makes it sound easy. The HTS40 is also an emphatic demonstration that there is no replacement for displacement with soundtracks of this nature. The experience of a centre speaker that is capable of reaching 40Hz with negligible roll-off is something that genuinely changes your experience of the action on screen.

All this is helped by the HTS Series' seemingly limitless headroom. With the power on tap from the Anthem/ATC combi, the only limitation to how loud the speakers would go became my own sense of self-preservation.

Surround handling from front to back is excellent. The climactic sequence of *Atomic Blonde* (Blu-ray), with the crowds moving through the streets, is a wall of noise and energy, but there is still a sense of order and cohesion to what you experience. This is helped by each HTS

SPECIFICATIONS

HTS40

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6.5in doped paper cone bass driver; 1 x 3in dome midrange unit; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, on-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 32Hz-22kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 85dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 380(w) x 740(h) x 154(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 23kg

HTS40C

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6.5in doped paper cone bass driver; 1 x 3in dome midrange unit; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, on-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 32Hz-22kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 85dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 740(w) x 380(h) x 154(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 23kg

HTS11

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6in doped paper cone midbass driver; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, on-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-22kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 85dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 305(w) x 490(h) x 137(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 11kg

C1 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in down-firing doped paper woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 18Hz-250Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 200W Class AB amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 360(w) x 410(h) x 360(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24kg **FEATURES:** LFE input; stereo phono input; speaker level input; 12V trigger

PARTNER WITH



BLADE RUNNER 2049

(BLU-RAY): Sure, it's a drag that this sci-fi sequel doesn't get an Atmos mix on its UK Blu-ray, but that doesn't mean its DTS-HD MA track can't get your juices flowing. This oozes subtle ambience and fine FX placement.

model having enough dispersion to ensure that you sit in a single soundfield rather than seven distinct points of sound. And there is still the same ability to make the effect that matters – a single gunshot – the sole focus of your attention.

Classy fidelity

As a company with a long heritage of professional and monitor applications, the classy fidelity and dynamic ability of this setup should not be a huge surprise, but to experience a set of speakers that delivers so much of whatever you ask them to play while putting so little of themselves into that presentation is still noteworthy. This is an unashamedly expensive 7.1 array, and even at this elevated price point there are more discreet options for those that need their equipment to truly hide away. What the HTS package offers, however, is a sweet spot of sheer ability combined with effective space saving, allowing for a devastatingly capable AV system to be accommodated in an area that might not otherwise be deemed up the task. Who says that practical can't be fun? ■

HCC VERDICT



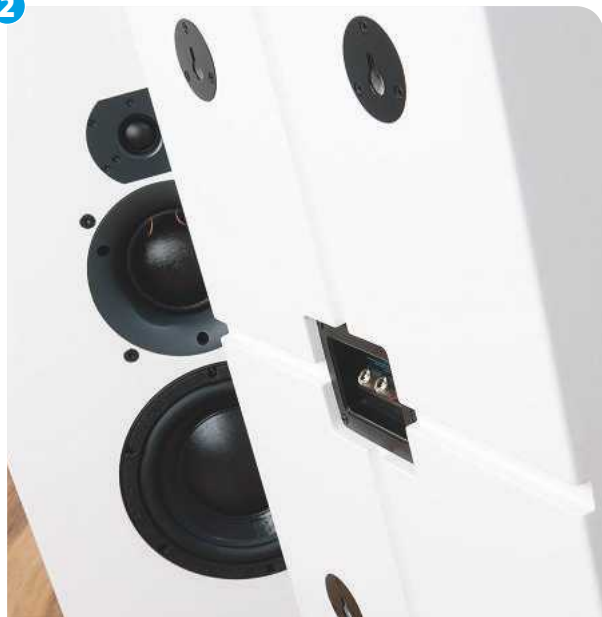
ATC HTS40 7.1

→ £9,250 approx → www.atcloudspeakers.co.uk

WE SAY: A deeply impressive combination of audio ability and installation practicality. If you have the power to drive them, these ATCs will delight.

2. Recessed speaker terminals help get a snug on-wall fit

2



“With world-class beaches, spectacular mountains and an eclectic food scene, Australia offers the perfect setting for an unforgettable holiday.”

Amy Jenner, Travelbag Australia Expert

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AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Dolby Atmos-capable soundbar/subwoofer combi with 4K switching

POSITION:

LG's flagship 2018 soundbar system

PEERS:

Samsung HW-K950; Yamaha YSP-5600

Mark Craven struggles to accommodate LG's top-of-the-range Dolby Atmos soundbar, but is glad he did

LG reaches for the SK10Y

LG's SK10Y is a big, beast of a soundbar designed to partner premium 4K TVs, shove their in-built speakers aside and bring on Dolby Atmos-flavoured home cinema entertainment. Manufactured in partnership with Meridian Audio (as was the WK7 speaker, see *HCC #287*), it takes the top spot in LG's 2018 lineup. It's ambitious, as is the £1,200 price tag.

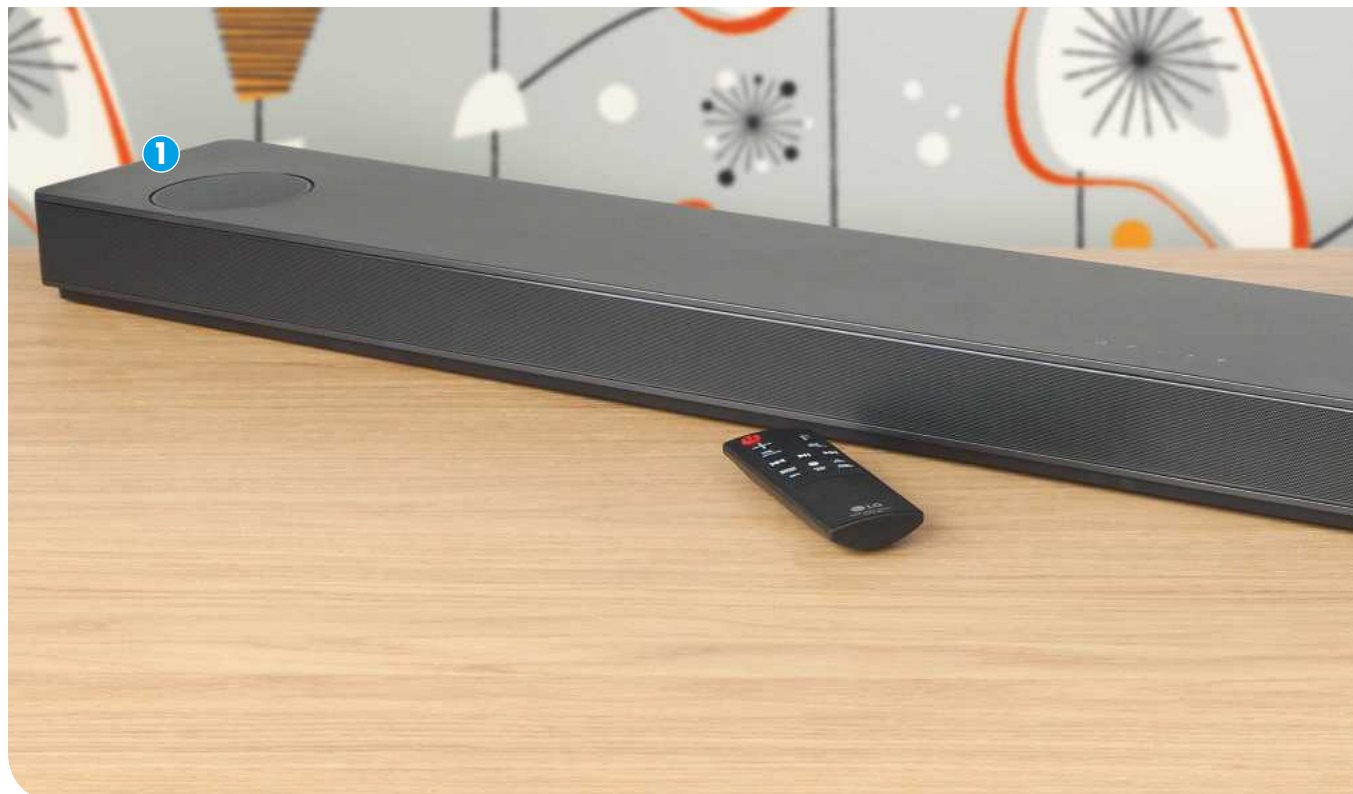
There are more affordable models in the LG stable – and, of course, from rival brands – but they don't promise the premium performance offered here. Nor will they possibly cause as much installation headscratching.

'Look at the size of that thing!'

There's no sugar-coating it – the SK10Y is absolutely massive. It measures a monstrous 1.44m wide. I appreciate

those mere numbers might not do it justice, so get out a tape measure and see for yourself exactly how long that is. It renders most typical AV furniture useless, and stands wider than all screens below 65in. So there's plenty to consider before you purchase.

Despite the size, it's not ugly. Its edges are round, and soft-touch controls take the place of physical buttons on the top plate. The metallic grey finish is on trend.



1. Full-range upfiring drivers are mounted at the end of the chassis

Visible through the grille on the front are clusters of drivers for left, centre and right channels. On the top of the chassis at either end are upward-firing units. A claimed 350W of power is shared around these drivers.

The subwoofer, which pairs wirelessly, wears a cloth grille around three of its sides, and looks neat. It's rear-ported, and offers no on-body controls. The driver is 7in, and the amp rated at 200W.

LG describes the SK10Y as a 5.1.2-channel design, by virtue of additional side-firing drivers. It also sells optional rear speakers to make a physical 7.1.2 setup.

When it comes to 3D audio, the soundbar will accept a Dolby Atmos bitstream via HDMI, and map it to its driver array (DTS:X, however, is not supported). There are two HDMI inputs, and an ARC-enabled output. Three dedicated inputs would have been better, especially at this price. During my audition, a 4K Blu-ray player and Sky Q box filled

the HDMI quota and left no room for a PS4. The only option is to route a third source through your display and come in via ARC, which adds an extra level of complexity and may knock Atmos off the menu depending on your TV.

Additional specs include hi-res audio playback via a network, Chromecast Built-in, Google Assistant functionality through external hardware, and 4K/HDR passthrough. There's plenty here to separate it from the budget 'bar crowd.

A step up in scale

The soundbar is at its best with Dolby Atmos mixes.

The score of *Blade Runner 2049* (via Sky Cinema in Dolby Atmos) is writ large and moody via the SK10Y's upscale driver/amp assemble. Surprisingly so, in fact – I was unprepared for the scale of the soundtrack swell, and the rich depth of the bass notes, as the film opens and we see K fly out to Sapper Morton's protein farm. It has cinematic flair, fills a room without batting an eyelid, and shows little sign of fatigue or distortion.

With Atmos tracks, the SK10Y showcases solid effect separation across its flat and vertical channels. Height details aren't lost amidst the LCR soundstage, but are clear and distinct. This is apparent in Chapter 4 of *The Dark Tower* (Ultra HD Blu-ray) and the moment where Jake is attacked by the house (don't ask...). There's a delicious crack of timber as the roof above him erupts.

The overall sound balance here feels better than last year's (more affordable) SJ9 – an indication, perhaps, of the LG/Meridian Audio partnership bearing fruit. Yet as with that Atmos bar, there's only so far it can go to can convey an authentic height experience from its two upfiring drivers. The reference trailers (*Amaze*, *Leaf*) on Dolby's Atmos demonstration disc offer flitting effects and failing rain, but – from a distance of around 3m and with the SK10Y sited on top AV furniture – all this action takes place in front of me. And nudging the height channel and >





3

surround channel volume controls via the remote didn't rectify the problem. Your experience in your own viewing room will no doubt differ, but I'd suggest the SK10Y is in need of an automated EQ/calibration process to help marshal its delivery.

The result is that you get something that sounds somewhat like Dolby Atmos, but isn't quite the real thing. However, I'm aware I'm coming at this from a different angle. In comparison to a traditional stereo soundbar, the sense of expanse and scale here is thrilling.

Late on in my audition, LG sent me the SPK8-S wireless speakers to play with. As you can get these for less than

'The Atmos mix of *Blade Runner 2049* is writ large and moody via the SK10Y's driver/amp assemble'

£100 if bought with an SK10Y, and that price includes a pair of speakers and wireless transmission box, I wasn't expecting them to be a tonal, dynamic match for the pricier SK10Y system. And so it proved, with localised spot effects sounding a bit underpowered. However, the addition of these extra physical speakers does make a noticeable difference to the overall soundscape, by providing a deeper field for the Atmos height channels to play around on.

It's tempting to say they are an essential optional purchase, but this introduces the usual issues of where to place them (the transmission box needs a mains power connection; the speakers need a suitable surface), and detracts from the simplified appeal or the SK10Y package.

When playing an Atmos soundmix the soundbar's Sound Effect modes are inaccessible. Switch to regular encodes (the 'bar plays out the lossy core from DTS-HD MA/DTS:X) or streamed music and you can select from Standard, Movie, Music, Bass Blast and ASC (Adaptive Sound Control) presets.

Movie brings the upfiring drivers into play, but it wouldn't be my always-on setting. Firstly, it should never be used with music, as it will turn your favourite tracks into

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 3 x tweeters; 3 x midbass; 2 x upfiring drivers; 2 x side-firing drivers
ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED): 350W **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs; HDMI output (ARC); Ethernet; optical digital audio input; 3.5mm input **DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA:** Yes/No **SEPARATE SUBWOOFER:** Yes, 7in woofer; 200W amplifier
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes **DIMENSIONS (SOUNDBAR):** 1,443(w) x 63(h) x 146(d)mm
WEIGHT (SOUNDBAR): 7.5kg

FEATURES: Dolby Atmos decoding; compatible with wireless rears; wireless subwoofer; Standard, Movie, Music, Bass Blast and ASC modes; Bluetooth; Chromecast Built-in; HDCP 2.2; WAV, FLAC, ALAC, WMA, MP3, OGG, AIFF file support; works with Google Assistant; lip-sync; user EQ; Meridian technology

PARTNER WITH



LG SPK8-S: Find a wall socket for the SPK8-S's wireless receiver and hook this up to its two smallscale speakers and you're good to go with 7.1.2 cinema audio. The cost of adding this extra level of immersion is £160 (but may well be discounted).

an echoey mess. It's really quite unpleasant. With film soundtracks it's more forgiving, and has the effect of pushing the SK10Y's output deeper and higher into the room. But is it better than Standard mode? Chapter two of *Fast & Furious 6* (Ultra HD Blu-ray) opens with a helicopter flying into view far left, and panning across the front. In Standard mode there's a tightness to its chopper blades and an obvious correlation between audio placement and image. With Movie mode the helicopter has more presence, but the sound of its blades seems to jump around the screen more. It will come down to a matter of taste.

Neither is Music necessarily the best choice for your tunes, as it filters some information through the soundbar's centre channel. This lessens the purity of two-channel recordings, although I favoured its presentation over Standard. Music sounds both more open and bass-rich; integration between subwoofer and 'bar is good.

Hi-res formats up to 192kHz/24-bit are catered for, and all others are upsampled to the same. Don't expect this to work wonders with your low-res files, though.

Feed me Atmos...

If I were to own an SK10Y, I doubt I'd play that much music through it anyway. Given its likeable performance with Dolby Atmos audio (and the fact you no longer have to experiment with its audio presets) I'd be trying to stick as close to an Atmos diet as possible. I'd probably budget for the additional rear speakers, too.

Usability is fine, the feature set is strong and audio performance can be breathtaking. It's not quite the finished article, though (the pseudo Atmos upmixing doesn't convince) and the price tag is considerable.

Oh, and don't forget how big it is ■

HCC VERDICT



LG SK10Y

→ £1,200 → www.lg.com/uk

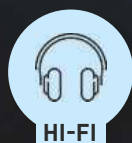
WE SAY: The size of this soundbar neatly correlates with the size of its soundstage. An impressive Atmos system, but greater EQ/calibration options would help polish its performance.

3. Two HDMI inputs and one ARC output – is that enough for your system?



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Steve Withers gets to grips with Marantz's multitalented, multichannel AV processor

Pushing the envelope

The AV8805 is Marantz's new flagship AV processor, capable of decoding a whopping 13.2 channels. In fact it's a technological statement of intent, an AV processor that boasts just about every feature imaginable. So not only does it support Dolby Atmos and DTS:X, it also handles Auro-3D – making it the only preamplifier to decode all three immersive audio formats at anything approaching a sensible price.

Some will own the previous AV8802A and are wondering if they should upgrade. What else is new here beyond the expansion to 13.2 channels? HEOS multiroom, Amazon Alexa voice command support, and eARC ability. Although, if you like having a built-in AM/FM tuner, you might want to keep your AV8802A because Marantz has dropped it from the AV8805.

The processor is classic Marantz, with a clean minimalist design and almost no controls actually visible. There's just an input selector, a volume dial and a cool-looking circular display surrounded by a blue light (which you can turn off). The fascia is hewn from a solid piece of aluminium, which makes it fairly imposing, but the two-tone finish softens the appearance.

There's a large drop-down flap, behind which you'll find a set of controls and some additional connections. The build quality is excellent, with a surprising amount of weight, especially when you consider there's no amplification. As far as the colour goes, it's black or nothing but that suits me; I prefer my AV kit understated rather than bling-ed up in a champagne silver-gold finish.

Getting connected

The rear of the AV8805 is a daunting sight, with a bewildering number of inputs and outputs. There's actually a total of seventeen (yes, you read that right) outputs using a choice of either phono or balanced XLR. I should stress that the Marantz can only decode a total of thirteen channels at any one time, but the additional outputs allow for different speaker configurations.

So assuming you have the room, the speakers and the inclination, you could wire up nine ear-level channels with five height channels and two

subwoofers, and run separate configurations for Atmos/DTS:X and Auro-3D, switching between the two.

The AV8805 boasts a total of eight HDMI inputs and three HDMI outputs, the latter allowing you to run two displays in your main room and a third in another. One of the outputs supports ARC, with the aforementioned eARC on the way via firmware to allow object-based audio from your TV. All HDMI inputs and outputs are version 2.0b, which means the Marantz can pass HDCP 2.2, BT.2020, and HDR10, Hybrid Log-Gamma (HLG) and Dolby Vision, so there's a solid level of future-proofing.

Additionally, there are two component video inputs and an output, and the more retro amongst you will welcome the multitude of stereo analogue inputs and phono stage. There's also a 7.1-channel input for anyone still rocking an older multichannel source, and a balanced XLR input. There are only four digital inputs (two optical and two coaxial), and no USB-B, which is disappointing given the otherwise comprehensive nature of the connections.

On the multimedia side, there's built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, plus an Ethernet port for a wired connection. There's support for Apple's AirPlay and Spotify Connect, along with HEOS multiroom, so you can listen to sources connected to the preamplifier in other rooms and vice versa. It's highly effective and all controlled from a well-designed app. Another app offers control of the Marantz.

You can stream DSD (2.8/5.6MHz), FLAC, ALAC and WAV, as well as lossy formats like MP3. The processor also supports Tunes internet radio, Sound Cloud, Tidal, Napster and Deezer, making it a very capable device for music.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
13.2-channel object-audio processor

POSITION:
Flagship AV processor in Marantz lineup

PEERS:
Arcam AV860;
Emotiva RMC-1;
Trinnov Altitude16

1. Marantz is sticking with its symmetrical front panel design

2. The handset looks cluttered, but remains intuitive to use



3



In fact, thanks to Marantz's heritage, it's one of the most musical AV processors that I've ever heard.

Video passthrough encompasses 4K at 50Hz/60Hz with full 4:4:4 sub-sampling, and the AV8805 upscales 1080p content to 4K. Imaging Science Foundation certification means there are calibration controls but I'd recommend tweaking the picture at the display end, and setting the Marantz to passthrough.

Despite its apparent complexity, the AV8805 is easy to set up, while offering a dizzying array of speaker configs; for Atmos, for instance, you have the option of a 9.1.4 or 7.1.6 implementation. Audyssey MultEQ XT32 room equalisation is reasonably effective but lacks the sophistication of Dirac Live, which is used by Arcam and Emotiva, or Trinnov's insanely capable bespoke EQ. I'd recommend assigning levels manually and then setting the individual crossovers for each speaker. During testing I ran a 7.2.4 system using a Trinnov Amplitude8M and Arcam P429 power amplifier.

Scaling new heights

The AV8805 can upscale soundtracks to 7.2.4, so I started with the 4K Blu-ray of *Dunkirk*, which is my go-to 5.1 disc these days. The Marantz delivered the action scenes with wonderful aggression, taking full advantage of the headroom in the amplification to deliver a dynamic experience. It made use of the available channels, opening up the overall soundstage in a way that felt totally organic.

There's a terrifying precision to the scream of the Stuka dive bombers, and the subsequent explosions add plenty of well-integrated bass impact. There was also a subtlety to the processing, with the sounds of wind and surf on the beaches rendered with a pleasing sense of realism. I've never heard a Stuka or an explosion in real life (thankfully) but I know what a beach sounds like, and the Marantz delivered it perfectly.

This unit can effectively upscale soundtracks regardless of which processing you choose, although I tend to favour Dolby Surround. It was especially effective during the Spitfire cockpit sequences, with sounds emanating from all the speakers as the airplane rattled through every g-force-inducing turn. It was so immersive that it sounded like an Atmos mix, even though I knew it wasn't.

I then moved on to an actual Atmos track. *Gravity* (Blu-ray) is another of my favourites, with its highly directional object-based mix that's a perfect test for effects steering and tonal balance. Dialogue often moves around the room in a 360-degree soundfield, and the AV8805 did

4





5

a wonderful job of moving the voices and effects from speaker to speaker. Mine are all B&W at ear-level but I'm using JBLs on the ceiling, so the Marantz impressed in its ability to keep every channel tonally matched.

The processor was also effective at creating a three-dimensional soundstage around my seating position, not only in terms of the voices and effects in *Gravity* but also during the scenes in space. Since sound can't carry in a vacuum, a lot of these effects are designed to replicate the way audio would be inducted through the body. This means the sounds are almost felt rather than heard, and the AV8805's ability to subtly use the subs during these sequences was key.

Of course we don't always want our bass to be subtle, so next up was *Blade Runner 2049* (Ultra HD BD) with its titanic, foundation-shaking Atmos soundtrack. Right from the start this mix puts a staggering amount of low-frequency energy into the room, and despite my best efforts, there are still a couple of rattles I haven't been able to fix with a lump of Blu Tack. The AV8805 effectively marshalled my two Sunfire subs at the front of the room, creating a bass performance that was smooth and even, yet powerful. It also underscored the rest of the mix, adding impact but never smothering everything else, which is exactly what bass should do.

Once again, the precision in terms of effects localisation and steering was impressive, with spinners flying overhead and the height channels being used to conjure a crushing sense of claustrophobia when the action moves to street level. The immersive nature of the soundtrack is best demonstrated during the scene where the transport is filling up with water; you'll find yourself holding your breath along with Harrison Ford as he impotently watches his younger co-stars kick seven bells out of each other.

My current favourite DTS:X mix is from the *Jurassic World* Ultra HD Blu-ray [see page 94]. This has everything from the terrifying roars of the dinosaurs – that use almost every frequency imaginable – to the subtler employment of effects to deliver the experience of being in the jungle. There are plenty of scenes that take place outdoors and the Marantz is able to create a huge soundstage with

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes (up to 9.1.4 or 7.1.6) **DTS:X:** Yes (up to 11.1) **AURO-3D:** Yes (up to 13.1) **THX:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** Yes. 7.1 phono inputs **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** Yes. 15.2-channel phono and XLR **MULTIROOM:** Yes. 2 x zones **AV INPUTS:** 4 x digital audio (2 x optical, 2 x coaxial) **HDMI:** Yes. 8 x 2.0b inputs; 3 x 2.0b outputs **COMPONENT VIDEO:** Yes. 3 x inputs; 1 x output **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 440(w) x 410(d) x 185(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 13.7kg

FEATURES: Audyssey MultEQ XT32; ISF certification; iOS and Android control apps; HEOS multiroom; Amazon Alexa voice control; DLNA networking; Ethernet; Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; USB; AirPlay; internet radio; Spotify Connect; eARC; HDCP 2.2; 4K 50/60Hz passthrough; 4:4:4 sub-sampling; HDR10; HLG; Dolby Vision; 192kHz/32-bit DACs; Pure Direct mode; DSD, FLAC, WAV and ALAC hi-res support

PARTNER WITH



MARANTZ MM8077:

Marantz has yet to deliver a 13-channel power amp, but this seven-channel model is an aesthetic match for the AV8805. Rated at 150W per channel, use it for your base-layer speakers and add additional amps for height.

enough depth, width and height to contain the film's paleontological stars.

The AV8805 can be both nuanced and aggressive, as demonstrated during the Asset Containment Team's unsuccessful attempt to actually contain the asset. There's a quiet moment as they discover the dinosaur's missing tracker, and you can hear it beeping, while the ambience of the jungle cocoons you. Then you hear a faint movement in the trees above, followed by a guttural growl that is given massive visceral weight by the subs.

The team is in big trouble and when the Indominus Rex attacks, all hell breaks loose. There's gunfire, explosions and deafening roars, and impressive use of dynamic range. However, within this sonic cacophony, specific effects are deliberately given more weight as a narrative device, and despite the busy nature of the mix the Marantz ensures these are delivered with precision. It's a great in-a-nutshell sequence that proves this processor's poise and power.

Worthwhile upgrade

As updates go, the Marantz AV8805 makes sense. The AV8802A was never under-endowed, but this aims higher (literally) with its additional channels and HEOS integration. It's a superb preamplifier, combining audiophile components with state-of-the-art multichannel processing. It sounds incredible with movies, and is equally adept with music, making it the ideal choice for someone who wants a system that can handle both with aplomb.

Arcam's AV860 might have the edge in terms of absolute sound quality thanks to Dirac Live, but the Marantz counters with those 13 channels. Trinnov's Altitude16 offers even more, but at over three times the price makes the AV8805 something of a bargain ■

3. A trio of HDMI outputs caters for twin-screen and multizone setups

4. USB, HDMI and headphone ports hide under the Marantz's pull-down flap

5. The AV8805 handles Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro-3D

HCC VERDICT



Marantz AV8805

→ £3,600 → www.marantz.co.uk

WE SAY: Marantz puts the audiophile into home cinema with a state-of-the-art 13.2-channel preamplifier that's both capable and great value.



**NEO
REALISM**
The Matrix hits
4K Blu-ray with
Dolby Vision
HDR, p98

Fade to black

Micro dimming technology and a direct LED implementation give this affordable 4K set a solid foundation for controlled, cinematic images. [John Archer](#) reports

FINDING A 4K high dynamic range TV that isn't either a) really expensive or b) far from mindblowing is a tough job. So many budget-priced 4K TVs employ low-contrast IPS panels that tend to fall apart with the raised brightness demands of HDR content.

Enter the Philips 55PUS6753. Despite costing just £700, this 55in TV uses a higher-contrast VA-type panel, and illuminates that panel via a direct lighting system.

I may sound like a broken record here, but televisions with LEDs directly behind their screens consistently produce better contrast than those that put their LEDs around their screen edges.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Affordable 55in 4K HDR TV

POSITION:

Sits just below the middle of Philips' 4K TV options

PEERS:

Samsung UE55MU7700;
Sony KD-55XE8596

More balls please

The 55PUS6753 supports two flavours of HDR alongside its 4K resolution: the industry standard HDR10 format, and the broadcast-friendly HLG format, recently used for the BBC's 4K World Cup and Wimbledon iPlayer streams.

Smart features aren't provided via Android TV, as they are on more expensive Philips sets, including its OLED models. However, the new 'SAPHI' interface found here is arguably better. The home menu takes up less of your valuable screen real estate, and there's more of a focus on the video streaming apps that most TV owners really want from a smart system. These include Netflix in 4K and HDR (given its own button on the supplied remote); Amazon Prime Video in 4K; YouTube in 4K; and the catch-up TV services of the UK's main terrestrial broadcasters contained within a Freeview Play wrapper.

Predictably for its price, the 55PUS6753 doesn't carry Philips' latest P5 video processor. Yet the Pixel Precise UHD system it does employ is still quite potent, carrying components for improving motion, contrast, colour, sharpness and noise handling – basically every aspect of the picture. It also lets you control all of its processing elements, which makes the TV relatively complicated to use. But, as we'll see, the ends justify the means.

For an added touch of glamour not usually found at this level of the market, the set integrates Philips' traditional Ambilight technology. This casts coloured light able to track image content from three of the TV's sides,



bathing the screen in a relaxing but also immersive glow. The frame enjoys a reasonably metallic-looking finish, too – although the set feels like it's made predominantly from plastic.

Connections are okay rather than great. You only get two USB ports rather than three, and you only get three HDMI inputs rather than the more common four. Also, only two of these HDMI inputs can handle 4K up to 60Hz. The other is restricted to 4K at 30Hz, and – oddly – this the input labelled HDMI 1.

Darkness is coming

Picture quality is in most ways impressive. The TV's black level performance, in particular, is superb. Dark scenes in the recent *Game Of Thrones: The Complete First Season* 4K Blu-ray release, such as those in the catacombs beneath Winterfell Castle, appear with little contrast-robbing greyness. Black looks pretty much black, which is a great image starting point for any home cinema fan, instantly making dark sequences appear more convincing. And credible black levels have a knock-on effect when it comes to colour handling; colours here appear well-saturated and dynamic.

The TV's direct LED lighting system, together with Philips' Micro Dimming image analysis and control engine, enables it to retain its base black level when presenting high-contrast frames. Night skies in *Game Of Thrones* are delightfully inky even when pictured behind a flickering torch.

There isn't even any significant light blooming around stand-out bright objects.

The 55PUS6753's pictures are also extremely sharp. Native 4K material looks every bit as crisp and detailed as you'd hope, emphasising the difference 4K can make over HD when it's handled well. The 55in screen size comfortably delivers a cinematic experience.

A switch to regular Blu-ray and broadcast TV finds upscaled HD not coming across as clean and pure as it does on Philips' P5 processor models; there's a grittier, more forced look to proceedings. Compared with other TVs

'Native 4K material looks crisp and detailed, emphasising the difference the format makes over HD'

around the same price, though, the upscaling is actually rather good, especially when it comes to adding obvious sharpness to sub-4K sources.

Choosing the Personal setting for the 55PUS6753's motion processing, with Natural Motion set to Minimum, reduces judder and image blur without creating many processing side effects. Again, the results aren't quite as effective as those of Philips' P5 system.

The one area where this Philips mid-ranger does live down to its price is brightness. I measured it only managing 350 nits when showing a 10 per cent white HDR window; far short of the 1,000 nits recommended for HDR by the Ultra HD Premium standard.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes, HDR10; HLG **TUNER:** Yes, Freeview HD; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs (all HDCP 2.2-capable, but one with limited 4K bandwidth); 2 x USB ports; RF input; optical digital audio output; component video input; stereo audio input; headphone jack **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 20W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 350 nits **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,244(w) x 729(h) x 68(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 15.3kg

FEATURES: Pixel Precise UHD processing engine; Micro Dimming; quad-core processor; three-sided Ambilight; 18ms input lag on average in Game mode; SAPHI smart engine with Netflix, Amazon and YouTube 4K apps

PARTNER WITH



JBL BAR STUDIO: Add this budget 2.0 soundbar option (£150) to the Philips TV for an affordable AV setup. There's no external sub, but its virtual surround mode is fun and the sound performance balanced overall. Includes HDMI ARC.



As a result, you don't get the volume of colour, or gleaming intensity in peak areas of an image, with HDR content. Sunlight reflecting on The Hound's armour in *Game of Thrones* lacks the real-world punch that much brighter HDR TVs provide. Nor do you get anything like the full range of light, or the significantly higher

average brightness levels, that HDR can deliver.

The HDR benefits you see on Philips' 55PUS6753 may be relatively limited, but they are at least enjoyable. There's none of the colour mess, black level shortcomings or peak brightness 'flaring out' that you often get with budget sets. Philips' TV knows its limitations and works within them – aided and abetted by its onboard processing.

Sound considerations

The 55PUS6753's mostly impressive pictures aren't joined by a particularly great audio system. It does a decent job with dialogue, and sounds quite open and clean in its upper mid-range, but struggles for bass impact. This leaves action scenes – and *Game Of Thrones'* dense opening score – sounding rather thin and weedy. I'd recommend partnering this flatscreen with a soundbar at the very least.

Neither this, nor the TV's lack of Android smarts or the company's top-spec processing, should deter shoppers in the sub-£1,000 market from giving the 55PUS6753 serious consideration. If you can live with only getting a fairly subdued HDR performance, Philips' new Ambilight screen produces controlled but also cinematic and immersive 4K pictures beyond what's expected at the price point ■

1. An alternative PUS6703 model offers a different stand design, and 43in and 50in sizes

2. Philips' premium sets offer a remote with QWERTY keypad – this one doesn't

3. Ambilight uses intelligent LED illumination to match onscreen visuals

HCC VERDICT



Philips 55PUS6753

→ £700 → www.philips.co.uk

WE SAY: While this set isn't bright enough to unlock the full capabilities of HDR, its pictures are otherwise polished, consistent and immersive. Ambilight adds appeal.

The bass invader

The SVS PC-4000 cylindrical subwoofer might save on space but does it spare the bass? **Steve Withers** finds out...

AS MORE FILMS rely on bass for dramatic impact, so the demand for subwoofers has increased accordingly. This is great news for subsonic experts like SVS, and it has recently replaced its impressive 13 Series with the updated 4000 Series, comprised of sealed [see *HCC* #284], ported and tower versions.

The SC-4000 is the latter, a cylindrical model that, while it might look like a giant pedal bin, has a 16in footprint that won't take up much space. Although it weighs a hefty 41.9kg, once it's positioned in the corner of your room it's surprisingly unobtrusive.

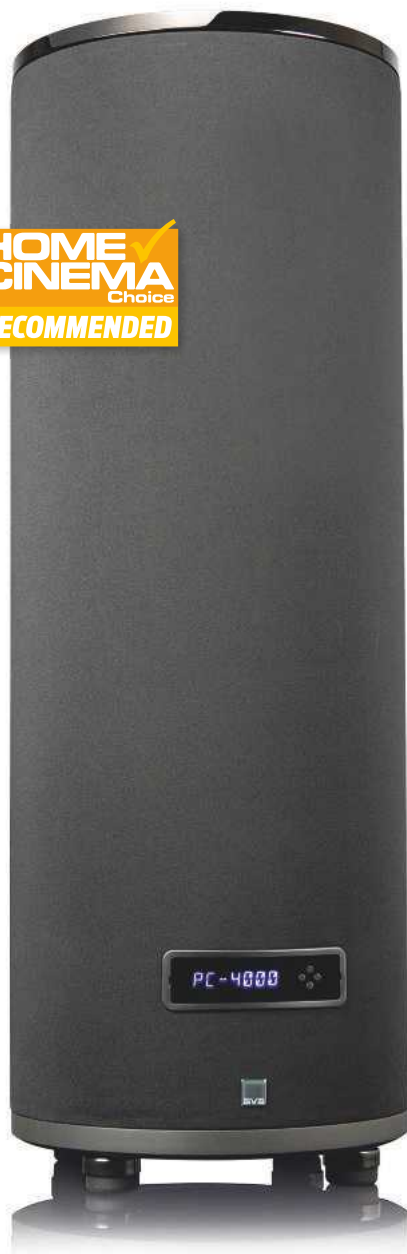
The build quality is excellent, with a solid MDF construction, a protective non-resonant steel mesh grille around the circumference, and a lovely piano gloss black finish. It sits on four large rubber feet that provide both isolation and support; after all, you wouldn't want this beast toppling over.

There's a 13.5in downward-firing driver at the bottom which weighs nearly 20kg on its own. It uses an edge-wound voice coil to better apply power to the composite cone, with grunt coming from a 1,200W Sledge amplifier. This uses Class D amplification with a discrete output stage that is reminiscent of a traditional Class A/B design.

At the top is a removable section that reveals the three upward-facing ports, along with foam bungs for a spot of room-tuning if necessary. At the bottom there's a display that provides feedback information, but it only lights up when receiving a command from the remote or app.

The remote is handy, because rather than going over to the front panel or worse, trying to reach around to the back, you can make any changes from the comfort of your own seat. However, it's the kind of credit card-sized controller that frequently disappears down the back of the sofa. Luckily there's also an excellent remote

HOME CINEMA
Choice
RECOMMENDED



app, which allows you to set up and control the PC-4000 using a menu-based system. This is available for iOS and Android, and connects to the sub using an instantaneous and very stable Bluetooth connection.

Along with all the usual controls like crossover frequency, polarity, phase and room gain, there's also a parametric EQ and three different presets. There's plenty of flexibility in setup, and a granular level of control, which is sure to please LFE freaks.

The menu-based control system means there are no knobs at the back, just the stereo/

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 1 x 13.5in, downward-firing composite cone woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Ported, vertical cylinder **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 17Hz-200Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 1,200W via Class D Sledge amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 419(w) x 1,190(h) x 419(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 41.9kg

FEATURES: Stereo/LFE phono inputs; stereo XLR inputs; SVS remote app (connects via Bluetooth); custom presets; crossover control; parametric EQ; polarity; room gain; bass management; port bungs

The PC-4000 stands over a metre high

LFE phono and balanced XLR inputs. I connected the PC-4000 to my reference Arcam AVR850, and tweaked the sub's setup in conjunction with Dirac Live room EQ.

Deep and controlled

The PC-4000 quickly reveals itself to be a superb performer, delivering deep and controlled bass. It might have a small footprint, but the sheer size of this sub means it can rattle your house with room-filling low-frequency energy, delivering bass notes that you feel in your stomach.

There's plenty of low-end extension here, but a surprising degree of subtlety. As a result I found it to be extremely nimble, dancing around the song-driven score of *Baby Driver* (UHD Blu-ray), but still able to land the gunshots and explosions. The sub can harness its considerable power, and release it with speed and precision.

Its output is taut, and it hits hard but doesn't linger, which makes it great for kinetic film soundtracks. The Omaha Beach landing from *Saving Private Ryan* (UHD Blu-ray) lets the PC-4000 strut its stuff, underscoring the explosions with perfectly timed impact but picking up smaller details like machine-gunfire and adding a visceral low-end presence.

I have auditioned SVS's PB-4000 ported sub and for me, the cylindrical version delivers an almost identical experience but has the benefit of not being the size of a fridge-freezer. In fact, if space is an issue then the PC-4000 might be the ideal solution. And considering the state-of-the-art subwoofery inside, it isn't that expensive either ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Cylindrical subwoofer with 13.5in driver

POSITION:
Member of the 4000 Series range

PEERS:
SVS PC-12 Plus;
SVS PC-2000

HCC VERDICT



SVS PC-4000

→ £2,000 → www.svsound.com

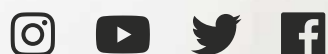
WE SAY: It looks like Darth Vader's dustbin, but this cylindrical subwoofer delivers big and surprisingly subtle bass from a limited footprint.



The best, redefined.

The new 3000i Series by Q Acoustics

Find out more



qacoustics.co.uk





All praise BenQ's budget belter

BenQ's latest affordable 4K HDR projector to hit shops is ridiculously good for its money, reckons **John Archer**

THE WAVE OF affordable 4K projectors just keeps on coming. Hot on the heels of a recent budget 4K group test [HCC #286], I now find myself lapping up an impressively talented 4K (and HDR) projector from BenQ that costs just £1,200. And 3D fans will be ecstatic to learn that, unusually in today's projector and TV world, the TK800 supports 3D playback, making it a possible upgrade to anyone clinging on to a Full HD 3D model.

Blue in the face

While it seems like a bit of a star on paper, it doesn't really look like one. It's far from ugly with its matt-white body, rounded edges and quirky blue fascia, but there's nothing about it that really shouts 'cutting edge'. At least at only 35cm wide it doesn't take up too much space, and its insignificant weight (4.2kg) makes it ripe for ceiling/bookshelf mounting.

The TK800's connections deliver the first hint of 4K action, with one of its two HDMI ports supporting 4K HDR playback. Other ports include a 12V trigger, RS-232 control jack, VGA PC input and audio in/out options.

The projector's image specifications are where things get really interesting, particularly its claimed peak brightness of 3,000 Lumens. That's a huge figure by affordable movie PJ standards, and could really open up the TK800's HDR potential.

Contrast is rated at a respectable 10,000:1, while a new colour wheel with 'ultra-precise' red, green and blue coatings – and brightness-boosting white elements – claims an impressive 92 per cent coverage of the REC.709 colour space.

The TK800 doesn't carry a native 3,840 x 2,160 set of DLP 'mirrors', but can manipulate these mirrors fast enough to deliver two pixels from each mirror for every image frame. This, in conjunction with proprietary Texas Instruments processing, delivers a 4K effect that's hard to distinguish from native 4K.

BenQ talks rather vaguely in its notes on the projector about a trio of HDR-based processes designed to retain more brightness, shadow detail and natural colour tones than HDR models customarily provide. Despite the lack of detailed information, though, it's quickly clear that these

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Budget 4K HDR
DLP projector

POSITION:
Currently BenQ's
most affordable
4K model

PEERS:
Optoma UHD51;
Acer V6810

HDR features aren't just marketing hot air. Even when fed an aggressively mastered HDR film, such as *Mad Max: Fury Road* on 4K Blu-ray, the TK800 rises to the challenge remarkably well.

For starters, the scenes towards the start of *Fury Road* where Max is detained in dark caves and tunnels benefit from deeper, more natural black levels than I've seen on other sub-£1,500 4K units.

As well as making such sequences look more immersive and convincing, this black-level prowess (by budget HDR projector standards) lets you see more background details. Also, colours in dark scenes look richer and more intense with decent black levels to 'bounce off'.

Provided you stick with the projector's adaptive Smart Eco lamp mode, those surprisingly effective black levels can be joined by some strikingly punchy bright highlights. The shot of Max imprisoned in a hanging cage, brightly lit against a darkened cave behind him, looks far more impactful and dynamic on the TK800 in HDR than it does in SDR.

This PJ doesn't give you the sort of beautifully extreme HDR performance a good TV can. But BenQ's nifty light management delivers at least a taste of HDR's advantages without the picture becoming unbalanced; it's not too dark, too short of shadow detail, or too peaky with its colours. In fact, far from feeling like a compromise, the TK800's HDR images often deliver genuine 'wow' moments. Good stuff, considering the asking price.

Superheroic sharpness

This budget beamer also excels with its 4K clarity. The pristine, ultra-detailed images of the *Black Panther* 4K Blu-ray are projected with superheroic sharpness and crispness. This clarity remains generally intact during scenes filled with fast motion, thanks to some blur- and fizzing-free motion handling. There's a touch of judder in camera pans during *Black Panther*'s final battle, but motion within the frame generally looks fluid and cinematic.

The TK800 does, inevitably, have limitations. For instance, while black levels are easily the best I've seen on such a cheap 4K HDR projector, you can get better ones on similarly priced HD/SDR models. Also, while its enhanced colours outperform rival HDR projectors, *Fury Road*'s deserts can look a little radioactive, and its skin tones can look slightly orange. There's occasionally some noise in colour blends, too.

These all feel, though, like pretty small prices to pay for the extent of the TK800's 4K clarity and HDR enhancements. Especially when the PJ also delivers its high brightness without suffering heavily with DLP's rainbow effect, or kicking out too much in the way of cooling fan noise.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 (via TI's XPR technology) **HDR:** Yes. HDR10 **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs (one 4K-capable); 12V trigger; 3.5mm audio input and output; RS-232; VGA PC port; USB (service); USB (powered) **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 3,000 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 10,000:1 **Zoom:** 1.2x **DIMENSIONS:** 353(w) x 135(h) x 272(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4.2kg

FEATURES: Single-chip DLP projector; 5W built-in speaker system with resonant chamber; 4,000-10,000-hour claimed lamp life depending on lamp setting; 33dB maximum claimed fan noise; 1.47-1.76:1 throw ratio (100in image at 3.25m); manual focus/zoom control; Bright, Vivid, Cinema, Sport, Football and User image presets; CinemaMaster Video+ processing

PARTNER WITH



ROKU STREAMING STICK+: Add video-on-demand and casual gaming to your bigscreen experience with this HDMI-based Wi-Fi media streamer. Available for around £60, it offers a solid range of apps and an idiot-proof user interface

HD Blu-rays are handled with refinement and subtlety, and this BenQ also makes a good choice for delivering bigscreen sporting events, even if you opt to keep a degree of ambient light in your room.

Gamers, meanwhile, will be reasonably pleased to hear that the TK800 takes a respectable 45ms on average to render images.

Depth charge

After a little prodding, BenQ managed to send over a pair of 3D glasses so I could check the TK800's stereoscopic capabilities. And they proved impressive.

Crosstalk ghosting noise proved pretty much non-existent, even with *Gravity*'s tough 'white-suited astronaut against black space' shots. The 3D effect is convincing and subtle, black levels look remarkably good, and the TK800's exceptional light output means that 3D visuals don't look starved of brightness, which can be an issue with low-cost 3D projectors. And this useful, image-defining luminance doesn't lead to the picture appearing flickery, and nor is there any of the red tint that once affected BenQ's 3D playback.

Just remember to manually turn 3D off once you're done, so that the TK800 reverts back to supporting 4K (you can't have both together).

Even the PJ's sound performance is reasonable. The 5W speaker – and resonant sound chamber it's housed in – deliver a clean, well-rounded soundstage. There's a dollop of bass, and the sound projects some distance from the chassis, although inevitably it still doesn't seem attached to the screen/pictures.

Overall, the TK800 has me baffled as to how it can do so much for so little. But I'd best leave off there before BenQ starts thinking about putting the price up ■

1. The projector offers a 1.2x zoom and 1.47-1.76:1 throw ratio

2. One of the TK800's HDMI inputs supports 4K HDR signals



HCC VERDICT



BenQ TK800

→ £1,200 → www.benq.co.uk

WE SAY: You'll be surprised that a £1,200 4K projector can pump out pictures – both HDR and SDR – as good as this. And it's solid with 3D, too.

Wired world

Devolo's latest powerline kit extends your home network without tears, says **Martin Pipe**



The receiver plug features a trio of Ethernet ports

PRACTICALLY EVERY DOMESTIC gadget needs some kind of network connection nowadays. But getting the network to where it's needed can be an issue, especially if your home is of a shape and size that makes a broadband router's Wi-Fi coverage an uneasy compromise. Also, in some densely populated areas, Wi-Fi can be erratic because many users will be fighting for capacity on the most common (2.4GHz) band.

Using a wired connection for demanding applications like video streaming, and leaving Wi-Fi for tablets and smartphones, is preferable. And if the idea of snaking unsightly CAT5 Ethernet cables around the home scares you, fear not – powerline networking devices, such as this unit from German company Devolo, use your home's existing mains wiring to carry high-speed data as well as power.

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Powerline networking starter kit

POSITION: Tops Devolo's Ethernet-only range

PEERS: TP-Link TL-PA8010PKIT; Netgear Powerline PLP1200

Start me up

The £130 Devolo dLAN 1200 triple+ Starter Kit provides all you need to get going. It consists of two adaptors that resemble overweight mains plugs. One (which we'll call the 'transmitter') is inserted into the

wall socket nearest your router, while the other one (the 'receiver') is plugged in wherever data is needed. Included in the package are two Ethernet cables. One links transmitter to router, while the other will connect the receiver to one of your devices.

Actually the receiver has an in-built Ethernet hub, enabling as many as three devices to be accommodated (hence the 'triple'). Your viewing room's smart TV, networked AVR and games console could thus be online (and not via Wi-Fi) simultaneously, with no need to swap cables. Between them is shared the total capacity of the link, which Devolo says can be as high as 1200Mbps.

Installation is a doddle, not least because front-mounted 'passthrough' mains sockets mean no outlets are lost. The adaptor cannot, however, revolve around the plug, and so some tight spots (sockets under cupboards, for example) may be denied to it.

After pressing side-mounted buttons to initiate a pairing process, the result should be a secure (it's encrypted) and reliable link.

The data transfer rate you'll get depends on the distance between transmitter and receiver; the nearer the better, but a range of up to 400m is claimed. Also important is the state of your mains wiring (distribution boards aren't recommended) and 'quality' of your electricity supply.

The supplied receiver lacks a Wi-Fi hotspot, which might have been a useful feature. Some other adaptors (from Devolo and third

SPECIFICATIONS

CONNECTIONS: Mains plug and 'passthrough' socket (both); Gigabit Ethernet (transmitter); 3 x Gigabit Ethernet (receiver)
DIMENSIONS (WITHOUT PLUG PINS): 143(h) x 72(w) x 41(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 280g

ALSO FEATURING: Homeplug standard; Devolo Cockpit application; 'plug-and-play' installation; 1200Mbps powerline link with 128-bit AES encryption; 400m range; multiple receivers can be added; status LEDs; Range+ technology; maximum power consumption 5W (per unit; 0.8W when in standby); three-year warranty

parties alike) are indeed wireless-enabled. As long as they're compliant with the Homeplug industry standard, they should work with this duo; additional dLAN 1200 triple+ receivers are of course game, too. I easily got an older Devolo dLAN 500 Wi-Fi to dovetail with this kit, thereby adding Wi-Fi coverage. The available link capacity is, again, shared between the adaptors, according to their individual specifications.

Helping you to monitor the status of your powerline networking is Devolo's excellent Cockpit application, which is freely available for desktop computers (Windows/Mac/Linux) and smart devices (both Android and iOS). As well as indicating which devices are active, some idea of link speed is indicated. Cockpit also allows you to manage your adaptors, instigating internal software updates and password changes. If one of your adaptors has Wi-Fi, Cockpit provides access to its settings.

In terms of real-world performance, I didn't quite get the impressive numbers that Cockpit claims – note that Gigabit Ethernet wired connections max out at 1000Mbps, and so there may be capacity 'bottlenecks' elsewhere in your network. Using LAN Speed Test software, and with transmitter and receiver close, I achieved 165Mbps. That's far off the suggested peak, but more than enough for simultaneous 4K video, hi-res music streaming and responsive internet browsing. When separated by 60m, though, the link dropped below 100Mbps – still a very useful connection.

Overall, this starter kit gets the job done, and the Cockpit software is great for user management. The plugs themselves are a bit chunky, though, and some may want Wi-Fi hotspot functionality too ■

HCC VERDICT



Devolo dLAN 1200 triple+
 → £130 → www.devolo.com/en

WE SAY: Easy to install and use, this offers a simple fix to Wi-Fi weakspots. Prepare for variable real-world link speeds.

Sony MP-CD1

This portable PJ has the wow-factor form, but **Jamie Carter** would like a few more pixels

IMAGINE HOME CINEMA projectors were the same size as your smartphone. That's what's promised by this diminutive new projector from Sony, which can create 120in images and even runs off its own power source. Does that sound too good to be true?

It is. Arriving a few years after the penchant for pocket-sized 'pico' projectors that ultimately failed to offer enough brightness to replace 'proper' projectors, Sony is trying again with the MP-CD1. In terms of brightness, it's technically the best effort yet. Its maximum claimed output of 105 Lumens equates to an image that's always watchable, though the promise of 120in images is overblown. That's partly because of a lack of brightness (you won't want much in the way of ambient light), and partly because the MP-CD1's lower-than-hoped resolution of just 854 x 480 pixels – not even HD – noticeably degrades the image the larger it gets.



So the MP-CD1 is at its best projecting an image of about 80in from 2.3m from a screen/wall. There's automatic keystone correction software that works on a basic level, but the manual focus slider is less precise than it could be.

The MP-CD1 charges via a USB input

At least once it's setup, the MP-CD1 is incredibly easy to use. It connects to anything via HDMI, including phones and HDMI dongles from the likes of Google (Chromecast), Amazon and Roku. It runs off its own 5,000mAh battery, which lasts for between two and three hours, and can also be used to recharge a phone when on-the-go. The MP-CD1 also has an integrated speaker, although this is rather harsh-sounding.

There's no doubting the MP-CD1's convenience, but this well designed portable projector lacks in quality where it really counts ■

HCC VERDICT



Sony MP-CD1

→ £450 → www.sony.co.uk

EU.AUDIO-TECHNICA.COM/£2,000

Audio Technica ATH-ADX5000

Ed Selley treats his ears to some range-topping headphones with a high price tag

THE MARKET FOR high-end headphones has been a durable one in recent years, and this has encouraged companies to launch ever more elaborate flagships. Audio Technica has partially bucked the trend though. The ADX5000s are the most expensive headphones in its range and offer some aspects you might expect of premium headphones (not least a set of hefty 58mm, tungsten-coated dynamic drivers, placed in a frame using a process Audio Technica calls 'Core Mount Technology' to ensure optimal location and alignment). But what is less expected is how minimalist the rest of the handcrafted-in-Japan

The 'phones use sizable 58mm drivers



design is. The metal chassis that encases the drivers is open-backed, and constructed from magnesium for lightness and rigidity. This means that the whole shebang weighs just 270g. Sadly, the '3D Wing Support' headband design of other Audio Technica headphones has been removed, which makes the ADX5000s not as comfortable as some more affordable stablemates.

Performance is outstanding, however. These 'phones handle the

densely layered soundtrack of *Nightcrawler* (Blu-ray) with a blissful grip on space and cohesion. As Lou (Jake Gyllenhaal) enters the house after the shooting, the wealth of effects seem perfectly placed, with the ATs proffering real three-dimensionality. And, when it comes to hi-fi, these are also supremely revealing, delivering Twin Shadow's *Caer* with superb tonal accuracy and a real sense of timing, drawing you effortlessly into the music.

As an open-back design, noise leakage is very high, and pricey cans warrant a decent amplifier behind them, but these have appeal in abundance. If you do a lot of listening via headphones, the ADX5000s are a capable addition to the high-end ranks ■

HCC VERDICT



Audio Technica ADX5000

→ £2,000 → eu.audio-technica.com



LONG-TERM TEST

Humax FVP-5000T

TIME ON TEST: Six months **REVIEWER:** Steve Withers

THE HUMAX FVP-5000T was the first Freeview Play recorder to incorporate three tuners, allowing you to record four programmes while watching a fifth. It was released towards the end of last year, which is when I picked one up to replace a faulty Humax YouView recorder.

The FVP-5000T is available in three models, each with different storage capacities. There's the 500GB version that costs £230 (reviewed here), the 1TB version at £260, and the 2TB version at £300.

What's good about it?

Humax has been making Freeview recorders for long enough to know what it's doing, so most aspects of the FVP-5000T seem well thought out. There's a seven-channel/two-hour EPG (electronic programme guide) that shows you the next eight days. Rather than use a

thumbnail image in the corner, the EPG appears in a semi-transparent form over the channel you're on.

Thanks to Freeview Play you can also go back seven days and watch programmes via the various catch-up services, in the unlikely event you forgot to record something with all those tuners. The FVP-5000T has BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All 4, Demand 5 and the UK TV Play app, which gives you access to programming from Dave, Really, Yesterday and Drama.

There's also Freeview Explore, which provides highlights from all the catch-up players on one well-designed page, and the similar Top Picks which provides a content selection page. It only covers Live TV, Recordings and On-Demand programming, but tracks your most used channels and presents them in the Live TV section, thus providing a handy shortcut.

In terms of actually recording programmes, the Humax hasn't put a foot wrong in six months, never missing the start or end of a programme that I've set to record.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Freeview Play PVR with 500GB HDD

POSITION:

Humax's premium PVR model

PEERS:

Virgin Media V6; Sky Q Silver

Although if you're worried about missing part of a recording, there's the option to 'pad' them at the start and end.

You can also chase play, which is the ability to start watching a recording before it has ended. I use this feature a lot, as a way of avoiding advert breaks. My only minor complaint is that when you select the recording, the Humax defaults to 'Watch Live' rather than pulling up the recording. As a result I often accidentally start watching the live programme.

One final moan is that when I've recorded multiple episodes of a series, the FVP-5000T defaults to the most recent recording rather than the first. It's hardly a disaster, but does mean I need to check I've chosen the correct episode.

'The Humax FVP-5000T is a feature-packed and sophisticated approach to the modern Freeview tuner'

The obvious big selling point of the FVP-5000T is that it has those three built-in tuners, which Humax claims will allow you to record four programmes while watching a fifth. In reality that depends on which multiplex the channels are on, but with its three-tuner architecture the Humax is certainly capable of recording four channels while allowing you to watch a fifth.

In actual fact with a bit of jiggery-pokery, you can even record five channels while viewing a sixth. To achieve this remarkable feat, you need to set a timer reservation for one of the programmes and then press the manual record button for another. It's unlikely you'll ever need to record five programmes simultaneously; I certainly never have, with three being the most for me. However it's comforting to know that you never need miss any of your favourite shows.

What's not so good about it?

The FVP-5000T doesn't have any kind of front display, aside from a blue light, which annoys me more than I thought it would. Aside from often not being able to tell if the recorder is even on, you also can't easily tell what channel is currently selected.

My previous Humax YouView box had a front display, and I would often look to see the elapsed time on a recording I was watching. Obviously I can find out by using

SPECIFICATIONS

HDD: Yes. 500GB **TUNER:** Yes. 3 x Freeview HD **CATCH-UP SERVICES:** Yes. BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, All4, Demand 5, UKTV Play **CONNECTIONS:** Aerial in/out; composite video/stereo audio; optical digital audio output; HDMI v1.4; Ethernet; 2 x USB (1 x side-mounted) **DIMENSIONS:** 280(w) x 48(h) x 200(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1kg

FEATURES: Wi-Fi; Freeview Play; timeshifting; app with timer-scheduling and local streaming available; DLNA server and media player; record 5+ channels simultaneously; SMB/FTP access; compatibility with H3 and Humax Eye; media playback from USB; Top Picks; Smart Search; universal remote; apps incl. Netflix and YouTube

the remote, but that just isn't as fast as simply glancing at a front display.

It isn't a major issue because I don't really use the Netflix app on the Humax, but if you plan to you should be aware that the recorder is locked to 50Hz, which means that 24p content suffers from judder.

One feature of the FVP-5000T that really appealed to me was the opportunity to use DLNA to watch recordings on a TV in another part of the house. Unfortunately I have never been able to get this feature to work properly. It's a by-product of my job that a lot of TVs pass through my door, and none of them has been able to properly stream recordings from the Humax's HDD.

Some TVs can't see any of the recordings, some can see them but not play any of them, and a couple have managed to play the SD recordings. However I have never managed to stream a single HD recording from the FVP-5000T to another device, which is very frustrating. Since the only common factor is the recorder itself, I'm laying the blame for this issue firmly at the feet of Humax.

Should I buy it?

The Humax FVP-5000T is a feature-packed and sophisticated approach to the modern Freeview recorder. Not only does it allow you to record up to five channels simultaneously, it also provides a well-designed user interface that is both attractive and effective. It remains the flagship recorder from Humax, is competitively priced and, minor foibles aside, the best choice currently available ■

HCC VERDICT



Humax FVP-5000T

→ £230 (500GB) → uk.humaxdigital.com

WE SAY: This excellent Freeview recorder ensures you'll never miss anything, even if it's unlikely you'll ever need to record four programmes at the same time.

1. The FVP-5000T can pair with Humax's H3 smart player and Eye camera

2. As well as these rear connections, the PVR has a side-mounted USB input



Destined for greatness?

Panasonic DP-UB9000

⏻/I

1

Mark Craven explores the audio-visual flair of Panasonic's imminent Blu-ray flagship

With its DP-UB9000, Panasonic is reaching for the 4K Blu-ray stars. A premium disc-spinner with audiophile credentials, it promises to be the brand's best slab of AV hardware yet. The fly in the ointment for home cinema fans is that it's not due to hit UK stores until around October time...

Considering the deck was announced in February, and rival brand Oppo has ceased manufacture of its own high-spec players, this delay is perhaps annoying. But Panasonic has its reasons, not least certification purposes for third-party apps, and no doubt the fact that any HDR10+ compliant machine will make more of a splash when there are HDR10+ discs to play on it.

This hasn't stopped the Japanese corporation showcasing the UB9000 to the world's technology press, and kindly letting me live with one for a few weeks.

What follows isn't a review, as – despite being told our sample was essentially 'final' – the smart cupboard was

obviously bare (no Netflix app, for starters), dynamic metadata formats weren't supported, and Panasonic engineers still have time to make firmware revisions. Consider it an appetite-whetter...

Heavy metal

Out of the box, it's clear that the DP-UB9000 will appeal to those who like their AV separates to look and *feel* good. This full-width player is gorgeously designed with a hairline fascia, and seriously heavy (it's much weightier than an Oppo UDP-203). It makes for a rock-solid presence on your kit shelf, with a styling that's more upmarket than Panasonic's 2016-era UB900. Gone is the drop-down cover that hides the disc tray, replaced by a centrally-mounted drive and front display that's reminiscent of – you guessed it – an Oppo UDP-203.

Both Dolby Vision and HDR10+ playback are due on this deck's final spec sheet. This is a sensible choice for a player that will land at £900 and hopefully remain in an AV system for a good few years. No one wants to have to swap out a disc-spinner just because they've upgraded their display.



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
High-end Ultra
HD Blu-ray player

POSITION:
Panasonic's 2018
range-topper, above
the £400 DP-UB820

PEERS:
Cambridge Audio
CXUHD;
Oppo UDP-205

1. The disc drive is mounted to a new high-rigidity drive base for added stability

2. The backlit handset is nicely laid out

As an accompaniment to this dynamic metadata support, the UB9000 packs Panasonic's HDR Optimizer processing. This is designed to work with the static metadata HDR10 format (found on all 4K HDR Blu-rays), and moves tone-mapping from TV to player. The idea being that Panasonic's own HCX Processor silicon will make a better fist of mapping the brightness levels of an HDR source to the native capabilities of a partnered screen, reducing clipping/blow-outs in bright image areas.

Dolby Vision/HDR10+ support and the HDR Optimizer are both scheduled for the step-down UB820 machine (and at £400, that's quite a significant price drop). So the real reason to be tempted by the UB9000 lies in its audio chops. In addition to a 7.1-channel analogue output stage, there's a balanced XLR stereo output for compatible hardware, a separate power supply for the deck's audio circuitry, high-spec AKM AK4493 768kHz/32-bit DAC, and the noise-reducing, vibration-damping physical construction (including double-layer base and top plates) – not to mention the hours of engineer tuning and 'high-performance' audio parts. Note, though, that while the

player supports various digital hi-res formats, SACD and DVD-Audio playback are not on the agenda.

In terms of day-to-day usability, the UB9000 barely puts a foot wrong. Discs spin with a delicious quietness and I had no freeze-ups or crashes.

The handset is similar to that of the UB900, with its useful -10s/+60s skip buttons and backlight. Onscreen menus are Panasonic's familiar black/yellow affairs that are easy to get to grips with, if a bit dull. The smart hub (from what I could see of it) features a 'three-dimensional' tile-based layout that feels dated.

All aboard the Avalon

I have no gripes about this player's video performance. Playing a 4K Blu-ray yields an immensely satisfying picture with lush resolution, balanced contrast and rich, deep colour. The luminous interiors of the Avalon ship in *Passengers* (Ultra HD Blu-ray) shine with intensity, while the blackness of the surrounding galaxy is deep and true.

During its preview roadshow, Panasonic's R&D boffins were at pains to point out the machine's superior chroma >



subsampling compared to rivals (the player automatically converts the 10-bit 4:2:0 signal of a 4K BD to 12-bit 4:4:4 unless told not to) via test-pattern show-downs. This sort of pixel-level finery is less easy to discern with film content, but I don't doubt their achievement. There's a wonderful stability to its images.

The HDR Optimizer tool proves interesting. It's accessible via the onscreen menus (or a long press on the remote's HDR Setting key), and can be switched on or off when an HDR10 signal is detected. Panasonic suggests users should always have it on, and I can understand why, as its effect is content dependent, and the majority of users can't be expected to know (or care about) the nit-level intricacies of their favourite movies.

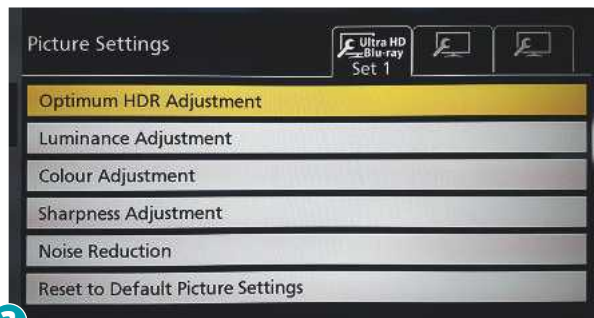
With an HDR source that doesn't push the luminance boat out, the impact of HDR Optimizer is negligible/nonexistent. Flicking between On/Off with *Dunkirk* yielded no picture change. 'If the luminance of a source is judged as low according to the metadata, tone-mapping is not applied automatically,' says the brand. Presumably, that is the case here.

Discs mastered to higher nit levels do show the benefit of Panasonic's tone-mapping though. I spun Sony Pictures' *The Dark Tower*, and switching HDR Optimizer in and out yielded subtle but noticeable improvements to cloud detailing amidst the movie's Mid-World skies. Fantasy flick *Pan*, with its twin bright suns, is a preferred demo from Panasonic.

I experimented with both a Philips OLED and Panasonic LCD, neither really considerable as HDR light-cannons. I would possibly expect HDR Optimizer to be of less use with a display with a higher native luminance, such as Samsung's Q9 series. With such a screen, though, you're recommended to turn to a tweak (HDR TV Type) within the UB9000's Advanced Picture menu. This offers 'OLED', 'Super High Luminance LCD', 'Middle or High Luminance' and 'LCD and Basic Luminance LCD or Projector' settings – equating to a tone-mapping target luminance of 1,000 nits, 1,500 nits, 1,000 nits and 500 nits respectively.

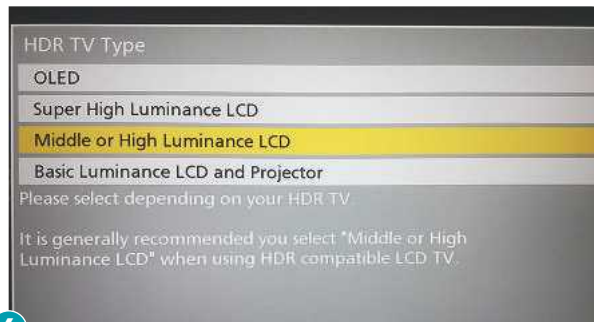
Additional user adjustments and features are comprehensive and expected. The player can be switched to output an 8-bit or 10-bit signal, and split audio and video over its twin HDMI ports. Ethernet, coaxial, optical and USB (one front, one back) complete the connections roster. Wi-Fi is integrated.

Sonically, the UB9000 impresses with its musical clarity. On this initial audition, used as a CD player via its



3

3. Panasonic offers two user slots for picture settings, plus a locked mode. Hit Optimum HDR Adjustment to access the HDR Optimizer



4

4. The UB9000 has four target luminance settings – choose the one that best describes your display

analogue phono outputs into a Pioneer AVR, it sounded superb, with fine resolution and immersive imaging; Led Zeppelin's *Kashmir* (*Physical Graffiti*) becomes the driving, soaring masterpiece Zep-heads know and love, with good weight to its low registers. Switch to HDMI delivery (which brings Panasonic's low-jitter phased-lock loop architecture into play) and it sounds no less assured; clean, crisp and accurate.

Labour of love

When the UB9000 finally arrives, Panasonic won't have the high-end player market all to itself. Pioneer, for one, has teased its UDP-LX500, which appears to be cut from a similar performance-first cloth, and perhaps other audiophile brands are considering a debut, now the 4K format has reached a level of maturity.

With this machine, though, Panasonic will surely turn some heads. The ignorance of legacy disc formats aside, its well-specified, and offers a rich AV performance. Build quality and design are easily a step above anything the company has delivered in the past. This is clearly a labour of love. We look forward to getting reacquainted with it later in the year ■

5



5. The unbalanced phono terminals are sandwiched by XLR outputs

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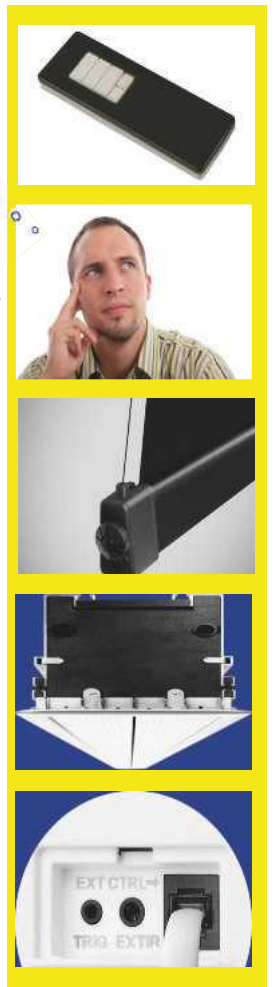
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SETC240WSF-ATR	2340 x 1320	92" x 52"	2935 x 155 x 170	16:9
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The BBC surprised **Mark Craven** with a full roster of FIFA World Cup 4K broadcasts via its iPlayer platform, but the result is more score draw than comfortable victory

FOLLOWING ITS INITIAL trial with *Planet Earth II* over the Winter, and a preview reel of FA Cup football in the Spring, the BBC unleashed a treat for Ultra HD flatscreen owners in June – all 29 of its FIFA World Cup matches, beginning with the tournament's opening fixture on June 14, were to be made available to watch in 4K (with HDR) via its iPlayer service.

For 4K telly addicts, this sounded like great news – particularly those not invested in a satellite, cable or streaming subscription that already brings them 4K content. Pixel-pushed premium sport for free? The future has arrived!

The reality, however, proved a little less exciting for some. No sooner had the service kicked off, some people (myself included) were wondering whether the free-to-air 4K future looked so rosy.

One eye on the future

In fairness to the BBC, when it announced the service it made it clear it was yet another trial. More specifically: 'The experience and data gathered from this trial will help the BBC to optimise UHD delivery in the future.'

What the corporation will surely have gathered so far is that a) people like to moan; b) not all 4K TVs are created equal; and c) the varying quality of UK internet delivery doesn't make for the smoothest of conduits.

A quick recap of the details. The BBC's 4K streams have been delivered in 4K resolution with HLG (Hybrid Log-Gamma) HDR at 50 frames per second. The BBC recommended a 40Mbps connection for a 3,840 x 2,160 feed, and said a 20Mbps connection would deliver a reduced (although still greater than Full HD) resolution. 'Audiences may find a more consistent Ultra HD

experience with a wired internet connection to the TV,' it added, wishfully, and hinted that there was a limit on how many households could view: 'This trial will be available to tens of thousands of people to watch on a first-come, first-served basis.'

My experience was at first a disappointment. I've always viewed my 76Mbps broadband connection as robust, but it proved incapable of delivering a live 4K feed that was anyway watchable, with a frequent stuttering/freezing. The situation did improve on later viewings, however.

A poke around social media and 'net techboards revealed others with their own frustrations. Owners of Sony's premium ZD9 TV discovered that it had been left off the compatibility list – when older, budget models from other brands were raring to go. Some complained of resolution drops and dim pictures. Others were annoyed that the footage was streaming with a considerable delay, meaning they were receiving goal alerts from smart devices before they'd even seen it happen. For many, any idea of enjoying a game of football was quickly replaced with talk of internet speeds and compatibility issues.

In one way, this is all good. The BBC needs to Beta test its innovations to discover what works, and what doesn't. I'm not naive enough to expect delivery of live-streamed 4K HDR 50fps content easy to master. But on the other hand, the danger is that this soft launch will have put some people off. Not those of us who are used to assigning 'enhanced' HDMI inputs and tweaking image settings, but casual users expecting 4K content to without fail blow them away. It's also made Sky and BT's own 4K sports coverage (admittedly not free and not in HDR) look pretty good... ■

*Did you watch the iPlayer 4K World Cup streams?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Mark Craven
made an effort to
watch every single
World Cup game,
but stopped when
he realised he'd
been dreaming
about VAR...





Film Fanatic

Two decades on from the release of the first DVD titles in the UK, **Anton van Beek** pays tribute to a format that refuses to die, even if its best days are long gone...

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DVD! As hard as it may be to believe, 2018 marks the 20th anniversary of DVD in the UK. Following a successful launch in the US the previous year, the whizzy new Digital Versatile Disc format enjoyed a soft launch on these shores in Spring 1998. Columbia TriStar hoped to tempt punters to blow their cash on yet another black box to put under their telly with the UK's first quartet of DVD platters: *Jumanji*, *Jerry Maguire*, *A Few Good Men* and *Fly Away Home*.

Amazingly, this didn't kill the new format stone dead and before long Warner Bros., Polygram and VCI all joined the party, bringing the likes of *Batman & Robin*, *Disclosure* and a 4:3(!) version of *The Usual Suspects* with them. And being lovers of shiny new things, home cinema fans gobbled them all up, helping to make the format an unexpected success (apparently, leading CE retailer Dixons was so convinced DVD would fail that, while it stocked players, it refused to promote the format in-store for the first two years it was on shelves).

As I was finishing a Film Studies degree when DVD launched here (and **having already blown my student loan on oversized collectible VHS tins of *Terminator 2*, *Star Wars* and the like**), my own introduction to the format didn't come until a little later when I graduated from university and got a job at a branch of Game. This wasn't the career path I'd envisioned, but it did enable me to quickly save enough money to buy a Samsung deck, easily hacked to be multi-region (along with a copy of *The Velvet Goldmine* to watch on it). By the Summer of 1999 I'd somehow managed to land a job as staff writer on HCC's new sister publication *Total DVD*, just as it was moving to a monthly schedule. Before long I was fully immersed in all things DVD-related.

As it happens, one of the first press events I ever attended for that magazine was a preview of Warner Bros.' *The Matrix* DVD, which packed some exciting interactive bonus features. Coincidentally, we've reviewed that same film once again, this time on Ultra HD Blu-ray, in this very issue (see p98).

The glory days

Even in 2018, where home cinema has moved on from standard-definition imagery and 'lossy' DD 5.1 mixes to 3,840 x 2,160 HDR encodes with object-based lossless soundtracks, DVD still holds a place in my heart.

For one thing, its current low-production costs and subsequent affordability means the format really has become the stuff of impulse purchases. Every time I visit a supermarket, I make sure to cast an eye over the shelves of DVDs to see if there are new releases that take my fancy. Only last month I scored a copy of the recently released fright flick *Pyewacket* on DVD for just a fiver.

Most of all though, it's the glory days of DVD that stick with me: those years when the major Hollywood studios were ready and willing to spend large amounts of time and money on creating bonus materials to fill up their (often multi-disc) releases. Sadly, those days are long gone, with only boutique labels doing anything similar. And whereas people get excited about Steelbook and O-Card packaging today, it's nothing compared to the elaborate boxsets we DVD buyers were offered in the past. Who out there didn't want to give a home to the 10-disc *Ultimate Matrix Collection* (yes, it's that film again) with its perspex packaging and limited edition Keanu Reeves bust? I know I still would ■

*What are your favourite memories of collecting DVDs?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Anton van Beek will only ever say farewell to his latex replica 'Book of the Dead' *The Evil Dead* DVD release when it eventually rots away to nothing...





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In The Mix

Just as Blu-ray has polished its performance during its lifetime, **Jon Thompson** is confident the Ultra HD format has room for improvement. And it starts with encoding

I HATE TO say it but I've never *really* been blown away by the picture on UHD Blu-ray – probably as my job lets me view 4K uncompressed masters. And it's not simply down to the slight loss in bite from scaling from 4,096 to 3,840 – to me, most UHD Blu-ray discs just look like good HD. But I recently met up with New York-based artisan video encoder David Mackenzie and my eyes were opened.

Mackenzie [interviewed in *HCC* #275] runs Fidelity in Motion, a company specialising in getting the best from Blu-ray and now UHD Blu-ray; the job of an encoder is to be invisible, letting you watch a movie, not the artefacts. Mackenzie has encoded titles for Arrow, the BFI and Indicator, among others. (The latter has some truly great titles, and I was startled by the Blu-ray quality of its recent release of Paul Schrader's film *Hardcore*).

When I met Mackenzie he showed me some UHD Blu-ray tests he'd worked on with film scanned at 8K to make a 4K digital master. **It felt as if I was seeing 4K on UHD Blu-ray for the first time**, and I was reminded of when I viewed a 4K master of *Taxi Driver* (pictured). That was gorgeous; it looked natural and real, and was everything 4K should be.

I've been pondering for some time as to why almost all UHD Blu-rays don't deliver the wow-factor they should do. It seems to me most titles are made via a Titan encoder, using the ATEME 5th Generation STREAM compression engine, designed to make very efficient streams for use on the internet. That seems to be the issue: it's not optimised for 4K disc. Mackenzie instead uses a custom workflow that he has developed over the years, specifically for disc-based playback. Two totally different animals, and a similar approach to that of Pixel Logic, one of the best global authoring companies, which has also

developed its own toolsets. This, surely, is the way to go. UHD Blu-ray has to be seen and respected as its own format, and not a spin off.

New blood needed

So, how's this going to change? With the involvement of new labels. It's the independents that clearly want the best for their releases, and it won't be long before the first indie 4K titles start to arrive. If the image quality in the final versions looks like the demos I've witnessed, then we'll be in for a treat, and everything that has come before will have to be redefined.

This is nothing new. If you look at Blu-ray, when it was released the first waves of titles produced didn't really look like the HD we have now. Reasons include the quality of the master, and how that master had been prepared. Some studios turned to the 'help' of digital noise reduction, and some early Blu-rays had fine detailed filtered off to make it easier to encode. It was a mess.

In the past few years, many of these titles have been remastered and re-released, and shown the true potential of the Blu-ray format. We've not even come close to showing what UHD Blu-ray can deliver. Most 4K discs are peaking at 80Mbps, when they could be peaking at 120Mbps (equating to 50 per cent more information). And it's not all about bitrates. It's about using that bitrate well and optimising the practical use of those bits.

So I'm grateful to people like David Mackenzie, as he's reignited my passion for the UHD Blu-ray format and given me a glimpse of its capabilities. Of course, his work is only as good as the films he gets to encode. The good news is I gather there are some intriguing releases in the pipeline... ■

*What's your favourite 4K Blu-ray disc for image quality?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at [@johnnyfocal](https://twitter.com/johnnyfocal)



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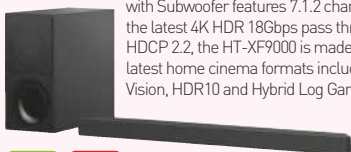
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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current tech? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

Should I pick a Panasonic?

Hi guys. I'm thinking of getting a Panasonic TX-58EX700. I know this is one of last year's TVs but for £600 at my local Euronics retailer it seems like a bargain.

The TV will be installed in a new kitchen/diner (we've knocked through an existing kitchen wall) where we imagine we'll be spending a lot of time. We'd be using it for Freeview, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV. We'd be viewing from distances from 2.5m to 6m. Do you think 58in is a good size, and is this model a good choice?

Jon

Mark Craven replies: The TX-58EX700 is a 2017 edge LED Panasonic model, and one that we haven't looked at (we reviewed the step-up EX750 range). It misses out on the HCX processing of that pricier model.

You shouldn't expect image quality fireworks from what ranks as one of Panasonic's mid-tier screens, but considering where you are thinking of installing the TV, this wouldn't be of a concern. I'd imagine your kitchen/dining area is going to be well-lit, which will negate the impact of LED light blooming, etc. A 58in TV is by no means small,



Panasonic's EX700 series offers a roster of catch-up TV

but the EX700 has a neat, unobtrusive design and you'd probably end up regretting it if you opted for the smaller 50in version. As your viewing distances are flexible (presumably due to the placement of seating in your room), it's hard to say what the 'optimum' size would be.

Do try to make sure most seats aren't massively off-axis, though, as this will affect the TV's contrast/colour performance.

You also said in your letter that the TV you have in your living room is 'around 10 years old'. This new Panasonic will be far superior, so be

8K push is pointless

Nice to hear that the IFA tech show will be full of 8K TVs [AV Avenger, HCC #287]. Only joking – what is the point of the TV companies pushing ahead with this higher resolution when the majority of people are only now upgrading to a 4K set? Buying a new flatscreen is confusing for most of us with new HDR standards and OLED vs LCD etc, so this will just add another level.
Phil White, via Facebook

Mark Craven replies: I'm all in favour of manufacturers pushing the tech envelope, and am partial to an 8K TV demo, because the detailing offered by these sets is extraordinary. It seems this year we will see genuine launches, rather than prototype displays, but I'd be surprised if these were anything other than very expensive. And I remain unconvinced that consumers are desperate for mega-sized TVs (as 8K sets will no doubt be).



prepared for the fact that you may soon want to upgrade that other TV, too.

Can I upgrade a TV to 3D?

Hi, this is going to be a stupid question. I'm upgrading my system and next on my list is a TV – however the TV I want doesn't support 3D. My amplifier and player are 3D-capable. So, the question is: can I buy anything to make it 3D?

James, via Facebook

Mark Craven replies: Unless I've missed some revolutionary invention, the answer is 'no'. A TV is either 3D-capable, or not 3D-capable, from birth.

Right now, you'll struggle to find a 3D TV available, as the format has been jettisoned by manufacturers and many software studios/broadcasters.

Coincidentally the Panasonic EX750 TV (see previous letter) was the last TV we tested with 3D playback.

DV plus HDR10+?

So the first Dolby Vision and HDR10+ disc players are on the way. I wonder who will be the first to produce a TV capable of both formats? Hopefully someone will by the end of the year as I would like to upgrade soon to a 55in OLED, but am reluctant to do this without both formats being catered for (or one format disappearing, but that seems unlikely).

Do you think a dual-format TV is likely in the near future?

Brian Davey, Hampshire

Mark Craven replies: As far as we know, there's no technical reason why an HDR display couldn't support both these dynamic metadata formats, but it's hard at present to see a manufacturer adopting such a strategy, as it would dilute the 'Format X is the one you want message.'

Fond movie memories

I was halfway through *HCC* #287 when I came across Anton van Beek's wonderful *Film Fanatic* article on the 10 films that have impacted his life. Appreciating the honesty and candour in his choices, I found myself taking a trip down memory lane and I was inspired to put my fingers to the keyboard!

My earliest recollection of film came from my father's enthusiasm for trips to the cinema but it would be my mother that would take me to the local picture house first, before the days of Cineplex and multiple screens, and when *Mary Poppins* had an intermission so children could have a comfort break! The first time in fact I ever got to see some of the Walt Disney animated classics such as *Snow White*, *Jungle Book* and *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* was on the bigscreen at my local cinema.

★ Star Letter...

Stream on? Stream off!

Firstly, I am a big fan of *Home Cinema Choice*, and have been buying it a very long time. I love home cinema, but I'm finding it more infuriating year on year...

With the reduced sales of physical media, more are using streaming services, but I cannot bring myself to use them. Firstly, they have Full HD movies – well, it may be my eyes, but they're not as good as the disc. I recently purchased *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2* on Blu-ray, and then on download to compare the two. The Full HD download was less than 6GB. What? That's about a quarter of the size of most HD movies from disc. Info is lost and compressed, and no matter how good the equipment is, it can't conjure up what is not there. On playing the disc, this was of course superior for sound and picture – and the disc was cheaper, too...

Most of these download sites don't use Dolby Atmos. Indeed, 5.1 is the limit of some. Then, of course, which one to use? Well, I want to watch *The Grand Tour* so Amazon Prime. But wait! Netflix has stuff Amazon doesn't have, so now I need that and... wait! You see where this is going.

So far I believe I need to subscribe to three sites, which, being honest, between free rentals at my local library for TV series, and the fact I could buy four movies per month with the subscription fees, why would I subscribe to any of them? Physical media wins out every time, and even if I spend the same on discs as my subscriptions, at least if one day I can't afford the subscriptions for a while, I have my films to watch as I please, rather than lose everything.

Then there's the Blu-rays with downloads. Firstly, by using a legal piece of software to rip my own movies, I can get identical copies, whereas the downloads are inferior. Also, I can download the movie to my Flixster account, which has proven very useful on holidays recently. But I just bought *The Mountain Between Us* and oh, I can't use Flixster, it has to be Google Play.

Why can't the movie industry get its act together? One site to rule them all, downloads zipped/unzipped to a copy

identical in every way to the BD? It just makes no sense. Look at Spotify. It's not complete, but it has by far most of the music the vast majority will need, on one platform. Okay, hi-res audio would be nice, but then I'd be spoiled too much.

For most that read home cinema mags, we're sorted with our discs. But for those who want mostly streaming services, what is the point of buying a good home cinema amp, as the services won't let the amp do its job? An old second-hand amp would be better in this case for 5.1 Dolby Digital. The movie industry needs a thump.

Michael O'Grady, Ireland

Mark Craven replies: I think a lot of even die-hard home cinema enthusiasts have added streaming/downloads to their traditional diet of DVD/Blu-ray. The premium-quality streamed TV of companies such as Netflix is ripe for a cinematic presentation.

There is, as you say, an overload of platforms and processes, spurred on by arguably an overload of content. Put another way, there's just too much exciting stuff being made that the urge is there to watch it all, which involves using multiple platforms. No one wants to be the one person at the water cooler who didn't watch *Stranger Things*...

4K Blu-ray is at the peak of quality and will no doubt remain there, while Full HD Blu-ray isn't shabby either in comparison to streaming/download options.

You ask why streaming fans should buy a good home cinema amp. Obviously the vast majority don't, which is why soundbars have been so successful!

Star letter-writer Michael grabs *The Shape of Water* on Blu-ray™, courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment. Guillermo del Toro's award-winning fantasy romance, about a mute cleaner (Sally Hawkins) whose life changes forever when she makes a shocking discovery at the government lab where she works, is out now on 4K Ultra HD™, Blu-ray™, DVD and Digital Download.



Dougal and the Blue Cat (1972): Probably my earliest memory of the cinema was this French drug-induced nightmare, based on *The Magic Roundabout*. It was released in 1970 but it wasn't until two years later that Derek Thompson would narrate (no doubt a totally different story to the original as was the case in all *The Magic Roundabout*

episodes) the English version and unleash it on an unsuspecting population. The scenes of the Blue Cat in the ice cave gave me my first experience of the atmosphere a darkened cinema can provide. The Cat's lair bathed in blue shadows scared the living daylights out of me! When is the 4K release due?

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1972): My mum had the wherewithal to lighten things up a bit following that darn blue cat with this often overlooked version of Lewis Carroll's classic. This was my introduction to fantasy film – a completely different world that I could escape to – and I was engrossed from beginning to end. This is the reason I love film: for a couple of hours you can suspend reality and all the AV wonders we covet in the pages of *HCC* help us to improve that experience.

Live and Let Die (1973, pictured): When I was seven my father took over the cinematic reins and introduced me to 007. Roger Moore was my Bond in the same way we all have a Doctor, in my case Jon Pertwee. This was also my introduction to the action genre – fast cars, gadgets, speedboats, explosions and Baron Samedi to give me nightmares! I've been a fan of Bond ever since.

King Kong (1933)/*King Kong* (1976): Movie monsters! It was seeing the 1933 version of *King Kong* on TV that shook me to my very core – big is definitely better! This launched my love of everything to do with people in foam-rubber suits stomping on model cities; stop-frame animation from the likes of the great Ray Harryhausen; giant robots punching kaiju (*Pacific Rim*); and, of course, *Skull Island*. I almost hyper-ventilated in the Summer of 1976 when I found out that a new *Kong* flick was coming out and this time the Empire State wasn't enough, he was going to climb the World Trade Center.

Star Wars (1977): I was 11 and I saw this seven times that Summer, which says it all. Sci-fi was always a love of mine that probably began with the likes of *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and the original *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, but mostly because by the early 1970s, the only time I was allowed to stay up a little past my bedtime was to catch *Star Trek*. Kirk and Spock were my heroes (they still are) but all that changed when I met Han and Chewie. I started two-timing the U.S.S Enterprise for the Millennium Falcon...

Superman (1978): Growing up in the early '70s there wasn't much on the home entertainment front. No internet, no video games (well maybe *Pong*) and only three channels on a black-and-white TV. I could have read books but I much preferred comics. My favourite always was and always will be *Superman*. When Christopher Reeve caught Margot Kidder falling from the helicopter, and then caught the helicopter in his other hand, everyone in the cinema was clapping and cheering! To this day I don't think I've experienced anything quite like it in a British cinema.

Sweeney 2 (1978): This second movie adaptation from the TV series quickly followed the first cinematic outing and is more memorable in my opinion, partly due to the scene of the car crashing through the



X-Men was the genesis of the MCU, says reader Ian Forster



shop window, but mainly because I managed to get into this 'AA' rated film (which meant you had to be 14 if unaccompanied by an adult) at the age of 12. Although I spent most of the film under the apprehension that I was about to be thrown out, I loved its gritty realism for the time.

The Blues Brothers (1980): Anton had *The Rocky Horror Show Picture Show* but for me this was a landmark in cinema. A star-studded cast, great musical numbers, hilarious comedy and unforgettable stunts and car chases. Like *The Rocky Horror...* it took musicals in a different direction from the golden days of MGM. As with *Grease* a couple of years before, it proved that musicals could play to a different beat.

Jurassic Park (1993): For the first time dinosaurs were shown as animals, not monsters. That in itself was a completely different take on the 'Harryhausen' films of years gone by. However the breakthrough was obviously its use of CGI. I remember sitting in a packed cinema in Leicester Square and during the scene where Sam Neill's character sees the Brachiosaurus for the first time, there were audible gasps from the audience. I walked away from *Jurassic Park* knowing

that with the help of computers, anything could now be possible.

X-Men (2000): Although this was released by Fox, I feel *X-Men* was the genesis of the MCU. This was the first superhero movie to prove it could be done and without looking ridiculous, and I loved the *X-Men* comics as a kid. As much as I marvelled at Tim Burton's *Batman* in 1989 (the first superhero movie to lose the tights and take a darker approach), it still landed slightly on the side of 'cartoonish' and the follow-up, *Batman Returns*, and subsequent sequels did even more so. *X-Men* proved that superhero movies didn't have to be like that and they could have a grounding in a world familiar to our own.

This isn't a compilation of my Top 10 favourite films of all time of course, although one or two may make it onto that list – no, not ...the Blue Cat. These are the films that helped shape my tastes for different genres or become ingrained in my memory. Either way, they've all given me my love for film.
Ian Forster

Anton van Beek replies: Thanks for such a detailed breakdown of your 'top 10' Ian, and I'm glad that my column inspired you! By the way, there's no Blu-ray release yet of *Dougal* and *the Blue Cat*, so I wouldn't wait around for a 4K platter... ■

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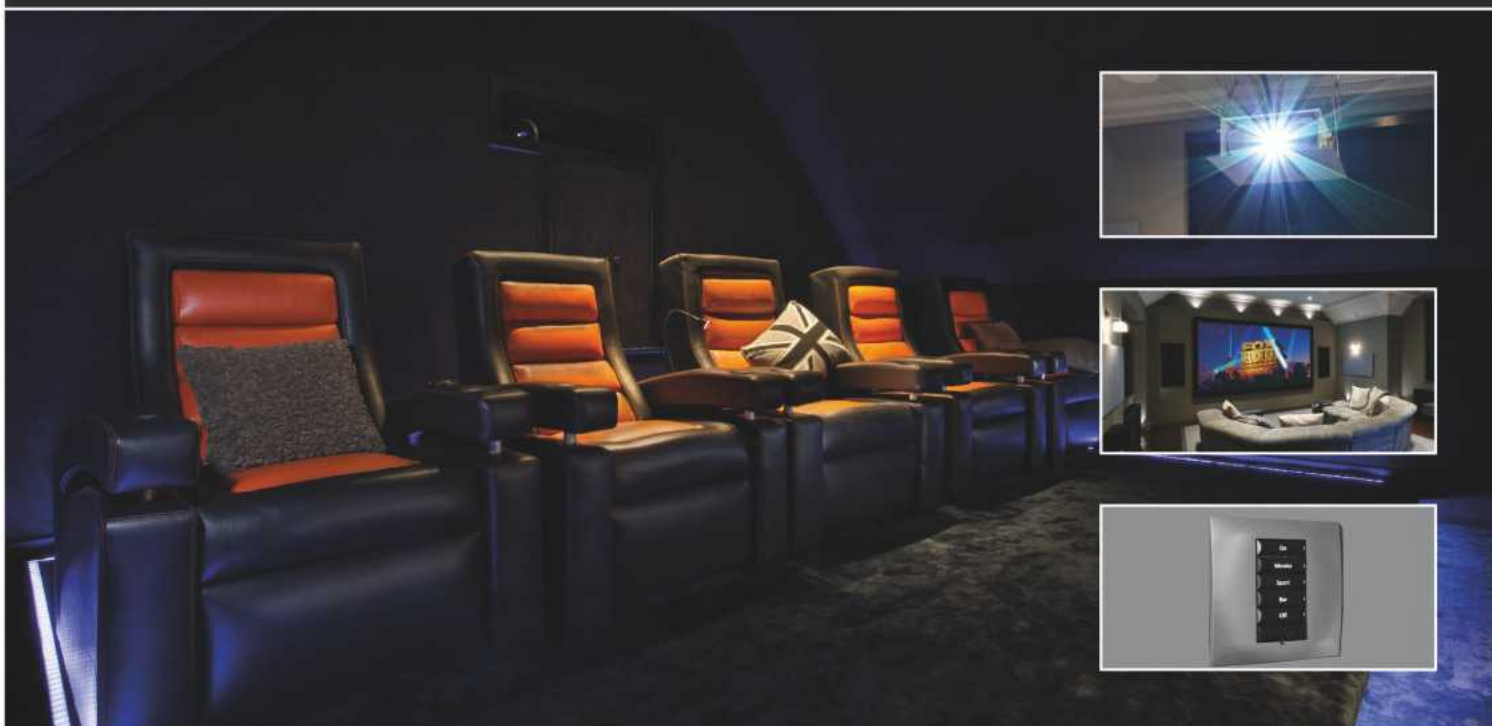
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Flesh + Blood

Rutger Hauer and Jennifer Jason Leigh star in director Paul Verhoeven's 1985 medieval epic about a savage and amoral band of mercenaries looking for revenge on the noblemen who betrayed them. The uncut version of *Flesh + Blood* makes its UK Blu-ray debut on August 6 and thanks to Eureka Entertainment we have 10 copies of the Dual Format Edition to give away to lucky readers!



Question:

Which of the following films was not directed by Paul Verhoeven?

Answer:

- A) *Basic Instinct*
- B) *Sliver*
- C) *Showgirls*



Red Sparrow

This sleek and sexy spy movie starring Jennifer Lawrence and Joel Egerton is now available on 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray, Blu-ray, DVD and Digital

Download. Thanks to Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment we have five *Red Sparrow* Blu-rays up for grabs!

Question:

Red Sparrow director Francis Lawrence previously worked with Jennifer Lawrence on which popular teen film franchise?

Answer:

- A) *The Hunger Games*
- B) *Maze Runner*
- C) *The Divergent Series*



You Were Never Really Here

Directed by Lynne Ramsey and starring Joaquin Phoenix, this critically-acclaimed crime thriller is out now on Digital Download, DVD, BD

and VOD, courtesy of StudioCanal. To be in with the chance of winning one of five *You Were Never Really Here* Blu-rays, simply answer the following question correctly...

Question:

Which of the following is the correct title of a 2011 film directed by Lynne Ramsey?

Answer:

- A) *We Need to Talk About Konstantinos*
- B) *We Need to Talk About Kermit*
- C) *We Need to Talk About Kevin*



Cannibal Ferox

An expedition to the Amazon jungle to disprove 'the myth of tribal cannibalism' goes wrong in director Umberto Lenzi's notorious 1981 horror. Previously banned

on these shores, *Cannibal Ferox* hits Blu-ray on July 30 courtesy of Shameless Films – and to mark the release we've got five copies to be won.

Question:

Cannibal Ferox director Umberto Lenzi also helmed which of these classic zombie films?

Answer:

- A) *Dawn of the Dead*
- B) *Zombie Flesh Eaters*
- C) *Nightmare City*

To enter any of the above competitions go to www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions

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Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Jonathan** has moved from a living room setup to a bigscreen Dolby Atmos den. Music Blu-rays are his passion, while his son gets busy on *FIFA*. Take a tour of the Granary Cinema



Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame – introduce yourself!

Hi, I'm Jonathan from North Yorkshire. I'm 55 years old

and a farmer.

How long have you been into home cinema, and what was the first setup you had?

My first memories of a screen larger than a TV are from the late 1960s/early 1970s when my mum and dad – about one night a month – used to have 'movie night'. They would set up an 8mm projector and portable screen to show silent home movies and silent films (Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy).

I loved it, especially the large image. It must have been about six feet across,

and this was a time when we only had a black-and-white 20in TV!

I became a big music fan, and watched a lot of music programmes and gigs on TV, but hated the awful TV sound quality. In 1984, I bought a top-quality AR turntable, A&R Cambridge [Arcam] amp, and Heybrook HB1 speakers. The sound quality on vinyl was fantastic, so I started piping my TV audio through too, a massive improvement.

The next upgrade was the addition of a Mordaunt Short decoder in the 1990s (complete with centre speaker and two surrounds). At this time my TV was a Philips 32in model which was quite large at the time; the next upgrade was a 40in Sony Bravia TV, which was great (and is still going strong in my son's room).

Sometime in the 2000s I did away with the amp and Mordaunt decoder, and

The focal point of the room is a 110in fixed-frame projector screen

A Marantz SR7011 is partnered with an older SR4300 model to power the room's 11-channel audio





Jonathan's cinema has room for five

replaced them with a fantastic AV amplifier, a Marantz SR4300. This was another giant leap in sound quality, and I added a Kenwood subwoofer so I could then have proper 5.1 surround sound. Next to be upgraded was the 40in TV, replaced with a 46in Sony model.

It sounds like you caught the AV bug! When did you decide to create a dedicated cinema room?

About seven years ago I fitted a motorised screen on the living room ceiling, and bought a second-hand Sony 720p projector through eBay. The screen would come down in front of the TV (the image was 96in diagonal) and it was great for a few years, but eventually the PJ packed up so we were back to the TV only.

As the living room wasn't really the right shape anyway, I decided the real way forward would be to have a dedicated room. We live on

a farm, and in 2016 we knocked a way through at the top of our cottage stairs into an old granary next door, in order to fit a new bathroom. After this, I cleared out some more rubbish from the granary in order to make room for the cinema.

The room is around 24ft long by 13ft wide and 9ft tall. It has a raised 14in platform towards the rear.

Of course, there was no other colour for the whole room than matt black, along with a black carpet. I'd advise anyone building a cinema room to use the same colours!

I bought a 110in fixed frame screen via eBay, along with all the speakers (apart from some Mordaunt Shorts that I already had).

Did you get any help from professionals with the cinema build?

I designed the room myself, but got a local

builder to build the frame work and plaster it all out inside.

We also got an electrician to fit the electrical sockets, etc, and fitted Philips Hue GU10 lights.

I used about 175m of QED 79-strand cable for the speakers. It was very easy putting all the cabling in, as I could get to the outside of all the walls and the ceiling.

What kit is in your system?

The projector is the brilliant Sony VPL-HW45ES Full HD model (I fastened it to one of the granary's large, old, wooden beams, which makes a perfect mount), and the amp a Marantz SR7011 (partnered with my old Marantz SR4300), driving a 7.1.4 Dolby Atmos speaker system.

The speakers are Mission MV8s (front L/R), Eltax Symphony (centre), TDL Studio 10s (surrounds), TDL Saturn 10s (rear



With his living room not ideal for a projector-based system, Jonathan decided to knock through into the granary barn next door...



To create a Dolby Atmos-friendly space, work began on a new lower ceiling and cabling for height speakers was installed



Next on Jonathan's to-do list is to insulate the cinema's external walls so Winter movie-watching is a little more comfortable



The PJ is a Full HD
Sony VPL-HW45ES

surrounds) and Mordaunt Short CS1s (height channels). I also have a Kenwood subwoofer. Source items are a Sky Q box, Sony PS4, Sony BDP-S790 Blu-ray player, Cyrus CD6 SE CD player, and an Amazon Fire stick (bought by my son).

What's your verdict on the system?

The end result is far better than I could have imagined, and if anyone has the space to build a dedicated cinema room, my advice would be to just go for it. You won't be disappointed.

We actually don't watch many films. It's main use is sport (mainly tennis and football) and music, and for this it is fantastic.

Do you have your eyes on any upgrades?

We will shortly be adding the AR turntable as we have a large vinyl record collection, and luckily the Marantz amp has a turntable input.

The next project is to build a middle room between the bathroom and cinema room, and to insulate the outside walls of the cinema as it does get quite cold in there in Winter!

Does the setup get a lot of use?

Yes, lots! My son loves it for his PlayStation games – *FIFA* is totally different at 110in rather than 40in!

What discs do you use to show it off?

The Blu-rays used for demos to friends and family are *Muse: Live at Rome Olympic Stadium*, *Roger Waters: The Wall* (fantastic in Dolby Atmos), *Imagine Dragons: Smoke and Mirrors Live* (another Atmos Blu-ray) and *Queen Rock Montreal and Live Aid*.

And what are your top 5 favourite discs?

I have a few Super Audio CDs and DVD-Audios

that sound great, but I recently got the Dolby Atmos Blu-ray version of REM's *Automatic For the People*, which really is out of this world! I can't wait for more classic albums to be released in Atmos – how about Queen, Pink Floyd, Muse, The Killers? Another Blu-ray I'm looking forward to is the Muse 'Drones' tour from two years ago.

What was the last thing that you added to your setup?

The cinema was first used in September 2017, and since then the only item of hardware we have added is the Amazon Fire streamer stick that my son got, although we don't use it very often.

Are you excited by 4K?

A future planned upgrade would be to a Sony 4K projector – and maybe adding a rear subwoofer (although I think the one Kenwood is probably enough) ■

Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch

- movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.
4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

Now what?

Email your images to **letters@homecinemachoice.com** with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the relevant questions above – then we'll be in touch!



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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **JURASSIC PARK** Spielberg's dino-tastic blockbuster and its sequels take a bite out of 4K **PACIFIC RIM: UPRISING** The Jaegers and Kaiju are back for Round Two **THE MATRIX** Take the Ultra HD Blu pill **WOODFALL FILMS** The BFI celebrates British cinema's working class heroes **BULLETPROOF** Sky plays cops 'n' robbers **& MORE!**

A whole Lara fun for fans?

Tomb Raider → Warner Bros. → All-region BD

Look out, there's a new Lara Croft in town. But is a change of actress enough to lift the curse that dogs every film based on a videogame? Turn to p97 to find out, as we take the *Tomb Raider* reboot for a spin on Blu-ray...

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



Trying to do Jaeger yoga in the city centre was clearly a very bad idea...



Rock 'em sock 'em robots

Ever wished you could watch more scenes of giant robots fighting? If so, it's your lucky day!



→ PACIFIC RIM: UPRISING

In a world slowly recovering from the end of the Kaiju war a decade earlier, Jake Pentacost (John Boyega), son of war hero Stacker Pentacost, makes an illicit living savaging Jaeger tech and selling it on the black market. Following a run-in with the law involving a homemade Jaeger, Jake and talented teenage mechanic Amara (Cailee Spaeny) are drafted into service to help pilot the Pan-Pacific Defence Corps' latest generation of mechs.

A good thing, too, as there's a new threat on the horizon: a rogue Jaeger that is more than a match for the P.P.D.C.'s best and brightest. Where did it come from and who controls it? Could it have something to do with the aliens responsible for the original Kaiju invasion? Well, what do you think?

Your enjoyment of *Pacific Rim: Uprising* will basically hinge on what you want from it. If you're simply looking for more of what Guillermo del Toro's 2013 original delivered, then you're in luck as there's no shortage of giant robot action here. It also doesn't hurt that John Boyega is a far more charismatic lead actor than the original's Charlie Hunnam.

However, anybody hoping for anything more, like a meatier story, more rounded characters or something a bit less formulaic, will have to look elsewhere.

Picture: While the first *Pacific Rim* had most of its big action set-pieces play out on dark stormy nights, this follow-up drags it all out into the daylight. The result is an extraordinarily crisp and intricately detailed AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode. Add to that a palette bursting with bright and intensely saturated colours, flawless blacks and accurate contrast levels and you have a Full HD presentation that will put a smile on the face of even the most demanding videophile.

Audio: As you might expect, *Pacific Rim: Uprising*'s robot-on-robot action provides the basis for a thrilling Dolby Atmos soundtrack. From the Springer chase scene (Chapter 2) onwards, the track goes out of its way to envelope you with positional effects that move fluidly around. And by the time you get to the attack on Shatterdome (Chapter 12) and the Kaiju showdown (Chapters 15 and 16), it is regularly delivering a relentless, extensive sonic maelstrom that makes dynamic use of the extra height channels while also digging up some truly earth-shattering bass. Brilliant.

Extras: The film is joined on Blu-ray by a middling array of bonus features. The bulk of these take the form of 10 short featurettes (running anywhere between two and six minutes in length) covering the expected aspects of the production (developing the story, the new cast, the Jaegers and Kaiju, etc.). Rookie director Steven S. DeKnight also provides a solo chat-track for the film and the disc's eight deleted scenes.



HCC VERDICT

Pacific Rim: Uprising

→ Universal Pictures → All-region BD
→ £25

WE SAY: Keep your expectations in check and you'll probably enjoy this action-packed sci-fi sequel.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Big Fish & Begonia

Manga Entertainment → Region B BD
£16



A girl from a magical realm sets out to resurrect the human boy whose death she accidentally caused

in this epic animated fantasy. Pitched as China's answer to Studio Ghibli, this lovely-looking film can't help but bring to mind the likes of Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* and *Ponyo*, but sadly falls far short of those films in terms of characterisation and storytelling. At least those who take the plunge and pick up the Blu-ray will be rewarded with a sumptuous AVC 2.40:1 Full HD encode and immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Limited extras include the original 2004 Flash-animated short.



Game Night

Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£25



Jason Bateman and Rachel McAdams find themselves caught up in a murder-mystery game gone awry in this

enjoyable comedy. Smart, cine-literate and superbly constructed (big thumbs up to the excellent direction, too), the high-concept *Game Night* delivers a witty riff on David Fincher's *The Game* that is packed with laugh-out-loud gags and clever twists. We wish as much effort had been made with the Blu-ray's extras (just a gag reel and three-minute *Making of...*) as was clearly put into its detailed 2.40:1 encode and pleasingly bass-rich DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack.



Red Sparrow

Twentieth Century Fox
Region A/B BD → £25



The latest collaboration between director Francis Lawrence and actress Jennifer Lawrence couldn't be more different than their *Hunger Games* sequels. An old-school

spy thriller, *Red Sparrow* sees the actress giving her strongest performance in years, so it's a shame the film suffers from a needlessly complicated plot and painfully protracted running time. Based on a 4K digital intermediate, *Red Sparrow*'s 2.40:1 AVC encode looks absolutely flawless, while a moody DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix provides solid sonic support. Extras include a chat-track, six *Making of...* featurettes and 10 deleted scenes.



War! What is it good for?

Reference-quality 4K encodes and Atmos soundtracks apparently...

→ SAVING PRIVATE RYAN: COMMEMORATIVE 20TH ANNIVERSARY

No war film captures the sheer brutality of pitting the fragile forms of men against the uncaring bullets and bombs of war better than *Saving Private Ryan*. Couple this with a beautifully pitched, unsentimental and authentic sense of brotherhood between the troops, and you've got one of the most powerful and enduring war films ever made.

With such a beloved title at stake, it's a huge relief to find that Paramount has done a stellar job of bringing Spielberg's masterpiece to 4K Blu-ray...

Picture: As you'd expect from a 20-year-old film, the UHD Blu-ray picture is a 4K scan from 35mm celluloid. The result is quite simply fantastic.

Particularly exceptional is its use of HDR. Much of *Saving Private Ryan* is filmed on external locations, and the extra naturalism and luminosity unlocked by the film's quite aggressive light range upgrade, together with the impact of enhanced colour tones, makes them feel especially immersive.

Aside from a slightly grey night-time church sequence, the *Saving Private Ryan* 4K BD delivers beautifully rich black levels to counterpoint the enhanced brightness.

All of this refined but also dramatic HDR quality is elevated even higher with the 4K platter's Dolby Vision master. This offers more refinement in the brightness peaks, and even more subtlety in the expanded (though still stylistically stark) colours.

Dolby Vision also makes the film's grainy finish seem more naturally integrated. Though in truth, the



4K
ULTRA
HD



40 barrels of fake blood were reportedly used for the Omaha Beach scenes

grain in both the DV and basic HDR10 versions is hardly ever distracting, and rather just feels like an authentic capture of the innate qualities of 35mm.

Audio: The UHD Blu-ray sports a new Dolby Atmos sound mix that makes its already reference-grade soundtrack even more monumental. The Omaha Beach sequence gives your Atmos speaker system a monstrous workout, as the enhanced dynamics and new height effects turn your room into a warzone. It's as good as fans have been hoping for.

Extras: For this 'commemorative' 20th anniversary release, Paramount has created/dug up no new extra features, which is a disappointment. There's just the same uninspiring selection previously released on the Full HD Blu-ray: a 20-minute *Making of...*; an exploration of the creation of the Omaha Beach sequence; a featurette on the score; a look at the film from the perspective of real-life veterans; plus a few other bits and bobs too minor to mention.

HCC VERDICT

Saving Private Ryan: Commemorative 20th Anniversary

→ Paramount → UHD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £35

WE SAY: An essential addition to your 4K movie collection.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Life finds a way in 4K

Will new Ultra HD incarnations render extinct the Full HD Blu-rays of these popular prehistoric blockbusters?

→ JURASSIC PARK: TRILOGY COLLECTION & JURASSIC WORLD

Jurassic Park needs no introduction, although it's difficult to believe it's been 25 years since its digital dinos ushered in a new era of VFX. Michael Crichton might have recycled *Westworld* for the theme-park-gone-wrong plot, but Steven Spielberg's assured direction resulted in a film as entertaining as it was astonishing.

Spielberg returned for *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, a darker effort that lacked the focused narrative and memorable characters of the first movie. By *Jurassic Park III* the public were bored of dinosaurs,





The lead characters may be human, but the dinosaurs will always be the real stars of the *Jurassic...* movies

HCC VERDICT

Jurassic Park: Trilogy Collection

→ Universal Pictures → UHD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £70

WE SAY: The original movies roar onto 4K disc with impressive HDR images and superb DTS:X sonics.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT

Jurassic World

→ Universal Pictures → UHD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £30

WE SAY: This surprisingly successful *Jurassic* reboot looks and sounds stunning on Ultra HD Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

and the film's limited budget and silly story buried the franchise for 14 years.

After such a long hiatus no one expected much from *Jurassic World*, but state-of-the-art effects, likeable leads and a well-crafted screenplay made this genetic hybrid a box office hit. Suddenly dinosaurs were back from extinction – again.

Picture: The original *Jurassic Park* trilogy stomps onto UHD Blu-ray in a boxset that includes the 4K discs and the regular Blu-rays. The films are presented in their correct 1.85:1 aspect ratios and boast new 4K transfers with HDR10 (despite what it says on the packaging there's no Dolby Vision).

Unlike in the US, where all four movies were included in a single set, *Jurassic World* has been released separately in the UK. The 4K disc is based on a 2K digital intermediate and is presented in its original 2.00:1 aspect ratio with an HDR10 encode.

Jurassic Park looks stunning in 4K HDR, with detailed close-ups, deep blacks, vibrant colours and bright torch beams. There's a thin layer of grain that gives the image a film-like quality, and Spielberg wisely relied on animatronics rather than digital animation, so the effects hold up surprisingly well for a film of this vintage. The CG is fairly low resolution by today's standards and appears slightly soft, but the 4K disc is a clear upgrade over the Blu-ray, and Spielberg's dino-classic has never looked better.

Rediscover *The Lost World...* on 4K Blu-ray and find what is easily the best-looking of the original trio. It's much darker both visually and tonally, but the HDR retains those inky blacks and reveals all the detail in the shadows. The colour scheme is richer and although there's a layer of grain to the image, you'll be able to see every crack in Jeff Goldblum's leather jacket. While the animatronic dinosaurs look scarily real and the digital effects are better integrated into live-action shots, there's still some softness to them.

Jurassic Park III doesn't just disappoint as a film, it's visually the least impressive of the original movies. The increased resolution and HDR deliver some sharp and colourful images, but also highlight budgetary limitations that make the digital effects obvious. Like the other two films, the image on the disc is free of compression artefacts, banding or black crush, so the relatively poor image quality is inherent in the original production rather than the transfer.

Unsurprisingly, *Jurassic World* looks the best, with a gorgeous image and a pristine transfer from start to finish. The DI wasn't native 4K but the detail is remarkable, especially in the 65mm sequences, and the blacks are deep, the colours realistic, and the highlights bright. This gives the image a fantastic amount of depth that trounces the 1080p Blu-ray, making scenes like the first view of *Jurassic World* from the hotel balcony simply stunning.

Audio: *Jurassic Park* was the film that launched a thousand audio demos, so it's only fitting that the remixed DTS:X soundtrack is a sonic barnstormer. The object-based track delivers a wide and open soundstage that takes full advantage of the

overhead channels; not just for obvious things like helicopters, but also for immersive atmospheric effects. John Williams' fantastic score is beautifully presented, while dialogue is always clean and focused on the screen. Naturally, the T-rex attack remains the stand-out scene and has never sounded better, with bass you'll feel in your chest.

The Lost World...'s soundtrack is equally as impressive, with a reference-quality DTS:X mix that makes full use of all the available channels. The audio has real clarity and plenty of dynamics, with an immersive soundfield and Brachiosaurus levels of bass. The surrounds are lively, and the sound designers make full use of the overhead channels as Stegosaurus tails whoosh overhead. This time it's the twin T-Rex attack that stands out, especially as the trailer is turned over and sounds emanate from every channel.

Jurassic Park III redeems itself aurally with a decent DTS:X mix that, whilst not as good as its predecessors, still delivers plenty of immersive dino-mayhem. The plane crash and Pteranodon aviary offer the best use of the overhead channels, but the entire film sounds solid, with constant use of the surrounds and clear dialogue. One thing is for certain: you'll be sick of the sound of that satellite phone's ringtone before the end.

As you would expect from a recent production, *Jurassic World*'s DTS:X track is a masterclass in modern sound design. It mixes big effects with more subtle cues that immerse you in the settings. The sounds of the dinosaurs are delivered with foundation-rattling bass, while the mix makes full use of the overhead channels. The scene where the Asset Containment Team realise the Indominus Rex is directly above them is particularly effective.

Extras: There's nothing new here, with the extras all being repeated from the earlier Blu-rays (the highlight being the multi-part *Return to Jurassic Park* doc). And would it have killed them to also include the 3D BDs of *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World*?



Jurassic World was a follow-up with plenty of flare...



Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



Jurassic World: Evolution

Frontier Developments → PS4, Xbox One, Windows PC → £50

Most movie tie-in games are dumb shooters or platformers, often low quality and invariably taking liberties with the source material. Not so *Jurassic World: Evolution*. This is a simulation strategy affair that gives you the reins to create your own dinosaur-filled theme parks and, from the off, grips you like the jaws of a Velociraptor.

Remarkably, it's not the first park management game based on the film franchise – that was 2003's *Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis* – but it benefits greatly from having been developed by

the same studio behind the excellent *Planet Coaster* and *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*. Fans of those two might find *Jurassic World: Evolution* a tad basic in comparison, but it has its own unique charm. For a start, you not only get to create dinosaurs, you get to muck around with their genomes to form all-new ones.

There are five islands to build on, a new one unlocked after you have completed all the set missions on the previous. Each gets progressively harder to manage, with storms, power outages, dinosaur escapes

and many other hazards thrown at you. These can get pretty overwhelming on later parks and time management becomes key, but you should have learned the ropes by then.

With Jeff Goldblum reprising his role of Ian Malcolm as narrator/guide, it feels like more than just a decent sim game with a licence slapped on. There are plenty of in-game references to events from the movies too, which also help with the ambience.

That's not to say it's all milk and honey; the game can lack variety at times. And it would have been nice to have a sandbox mode, where you can just build any Jurassic World you fancy. But these are niggles rather than serious issues.

There is plenty of fun to be had in *Jurassic World: Evolution* and in 4K HDR on PS4 Pro and Xbox One X to boot. You also get 4K visuals on a beefy enough PC and HDR on standard PS4 and Xbox One S as well. It can really look gorgeous at times. Then later there's running and screaming. We'd have it no other way...



You Were Never Really Here

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£23



Writer-director Lynne Ramsey's acclaimed thriller stars Joaquin Phoenix as a suicidal gun-for-hire out for revenge after his most recent job (the rescue of a New York senator's kidnapped

daughter) goes badly awry. Brutal and brisk (running just under 90 minutes), *You Were Never Really Here* comes to Blu-ray with a crisply defined 2.40:1-framed 1080p encode and a DTS-HD MA 5.1 track that brings plenty of power and presence to Jonny Greenwood's menacing industrial score. Extras are, sadly, very poor: there's just a single one-minute promo featurette.



Maze Runner: The Death Cure [4K]

Twentieth Century Fox → UHD Blu-ray
& All-region BD → £34



Delayed by an on-set accident involving its leading man, the third and final part of the *Maze Runner* series finally sees the light of day. Sadly, despite being an improvement on its dismal

predecessor, *...The Death Cure* drags painfully in its second act and still takes itself far too seriously for a film where the bad guy works for an organisation called 'WCKD'. Still, for all that, the film delivers a stonking AV experience on Ultra HD Blu-ray, thanks to excellent 2160p HDR visuals and a dynamic Atmos mix that is packed with distinct overhead effects. Extra features are plentiful, if almost entirely housed on the 1080p platter.



Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle [4K]

Sony Pictures → UHD Blu-ray
& All-region BD → £30



Sony's hugely entertaining action-comedy sequel/reboot makes a convincing transition to Ultra HD Blu-ray. Derived from a 3.4K source, but finished at 2K, the uprezzed 4K HDR

imagery (provided in both HDR10 and Dolby Vision formats) boasts sharper detailing, cleaner highlights and a richer colour palette than the 1080p platter we looked at back in *HCC* #285. An upgrade to Atmos audio also pays off handsomely, with the film getting plenty of play out of the additional height layer. Bonus goodies are confined to the Full HD disc.



Not so much tomb raiding
as boat walking...



Reboot isn't very adventurous

A feisty new version of Lara Croft is buried by over-familiar story tropes and action set-pieces

→ TOMB RAIDER

When you consider how much the original *Tomb Raider* games 'borrowed' from the Indiana Jones movies, it's hard to fathom why Hollywood has had such difficulty taking the games and turning them back into movies.

Inspired by the well-received 2013 videogame reboot, this latest flick pretends the two previous duds starring Angelina Jolie don't exist (how we all wish we could do the same) to give us Lara Croft's origin story. So, rather than the familiar experienced adventurer, this new *Tomb Raider* gives us a feisty bike courier with daddy issues, played by Oscar-winner Alicia Vikander.

Naturally, this state of affairs can't last long. And, following the discovery of a secret message from her absent father (Dominic West), Lara goes in search of an uncharted Pacific island to discover the truth about his fate.

In many ways *Tomb Raider* is the most accurate videogame adaptation to date. Not only does it lift much of its setup from the 2013 game, it also recreates entire action set-pieces, too. While that may be enough for some fans, the rest will be left lamenting the poor characterisation (which actually falls some way short of the source material) and an over-familiar story.

It may be the best *Tomb Raider* film yet, but it remains an utterly average piece of entertainment. Given the choice, we'd much sooner play the game again than watch this for a second time.

Picture: Shot using Arri Alexa cameras and sourced from a 4K digital intermediate, *Tomb Raider* swings onto Blu-ray with a masterful 2.40:1 Full HD encode. Details are strong across the board; from the brightly lit Hong Kong harbour to the gloom of an ancient tomb, the image constantly draws out plenty of finely wrought textures. Colours are bold and bright, while black levels are wonderfully deep and inky.

Audio: While the disc defaults to an explosive DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, to really experience *Tomb Raider* at its best you'll want to switch over to the accompanying Dolby Atmos soundtrack. Powerful and immersive, this creates an immersive 360-degree soundscape full of surround activity, discrete overhead effects and potent bass. We expect the shipwreck sequence (Chapter 4) to be particularly popular with anyone looking for material to demo their sound system.

Extras: *Tomb Raider: Uncovered* (seven minutes) is a general overview of the production. *Croft Training* (six minutes) focuses on Vikander's stunt training. *Breaking Down the Rapids* (six minutes) looks at the making of a key action set-piece. Finally, *Lara Croft: Evolution of an Icon* (10 minutes) provides a quick history of the games. ➤



HCC fave Walton Goggins (above) plays the film's villain, Mathias Vogel



HCC VERDICT

Tomb Raider

→ Warner Bros → All-region BD
→ £25

WE SAY: A thoroughly average action flick bolstered on Blu-ray by superb picture and sound.

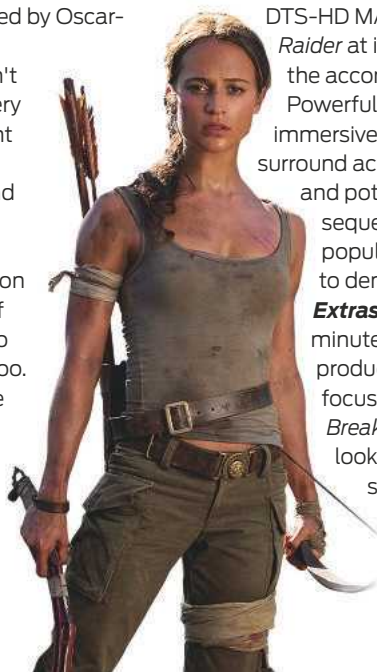
Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★





Sci-fi classic gets an upgrade

Revamped picture and sound ensure you'll never want to unplug from the Matrix

→ THE MATRIX

The sequels tried pretty hard to ruin its legacy, but *The Matrix* fortunately remains as original, stunningly shot, adrenaline fuelled, brilliantly scripted and cool as all hell as it was. If you haven't taken the red pill yet, now is the time; specially as you can watch *The Matrix* looking resplendent on 4K Blu-ray.

Picture: Despite the film being nearly 20 years old and stuffed with the sort of dark and stark imagery that doesn't always translate well from celluloid to digital HDR, Warner Bros – under the supervision of cinematographer Bill Pope – has delivered a superb Ultra HD image.

The unusually extreme contrast is dialled up spectacularly. Deep blacks regularly and effectively share the screen with extremely punchy, bold whites – but without anything looking overblown.

Also, while the 4K upgrade opens up the palette, it does so without leaving the image overwhelmed by the green tones of the 'Matrix' or blue tones of the 'real' world, as previous home video versions have been. This is a joy to behold – especially with the gorgeously refined Dolby Vision pass – and makes the film's world(s) much easier to lose yourself in.

The 4K picture is beautifully detailed. Pores and hairs are far more obvious than in the 1080p encode, while locations feel tangibly more weathered, grubby and battered, thanks to the extra colour and texture subtleties on show.

As you would expect from a scan of a celluloid source, the image's finish exhibits native film grain. However, this never feels overwhelming or anything other than entirely appropriate.



4K
ULTRA
HD



The two *Matrix* sequels are rumoured to be hitting 4K Blu-ray later this year

Audio: *The Matrix* has been given a new Dolby Atmos upmix to accompany its 4K visuals and, aside from not injecting many height effects, it's a beast.

The track delivers enormous bass extension and dynamics, as well as violent transitions around your speakers that make many more modern mixes seem positively tame. The score has been ramped up too, resulting in a soundtrack that's even more dazzling at both selling an action scene and imprisoning you in a made-up world than it was before.

Extras: Sealing this incredibly sweet deal is a wealth of excellent features. The 4K disc includes no less than four separate commentaries from film critics and philosophers (!) as well as the cast, the crew and composer Don Davis.

The accompanying Blu-ray, meanwhile, carries hours of other goodies, including a feature-length documentary and 'Follow The White Rabbit' and 'Take The Red Pill' collections of short featurettes.

HCC VERDICT

The Matrix

→ Warner Bros. → UHD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £30

WE SAY: The Wachowskis' mind-blowing masterpiece is more essential than ever on 4K Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

I Kill Giants

Kaleidoscope → R2 DVD
£16



With its story about a young girl who is not only convinced that giants exist, but that she is the only person

who can defeat them, *I Kill Giants* often seems like a female take on ground already trod by *When a Monster Calls*. While this does make its approach to the subject matter feel a little second-hand, young lead Madison Wolfe gives an astonishing performance that lends the film its own sense of vitality and gravity. This DVD (there's no UK Blu-ray planned) recreates the film's gloomy palette cleanly, despite the odd bit of shimmer, while the DD5.1 packs some hefty bass.



The Bridge: Season Four

Arrow TV → Region B BD
£35



If this is indeed to be the final instalment in the popular Nordic crime series then those responsible for it should

be applauded for ensuring it has gone out on a high. Across eight episodes it not only presents us with a satisfyingly complex crime story, but also wraps up several ongoing story threads and continues to develop its main protagonist (Sofia Helin's Saga Norén) into one of the most fascinating characters to ever grace the smallscreen. While this Blu-ray release looks and sounds superb, the lack of extras beyond a trailer is a real shame.



The China Syndrome

Indicator → All-region BD
£16



Best remembered for its unanticipated topicality – the film opened at US cinemas just 12 days before the Three Mile

Island nuclear accident – this conspiracy thriller still holds up today thanks to a savvy script and top-notch performances from the likes of Jane Fonda and Jack Lemmon. This fairly modest looking BD release won't top anyone's list of the year's best HD experiences, but is still an improvement on the old DVD. As well as porting over two featurettes and a trio of deleted scenes from that release, Indicator has added a 79-minute Q&A with Lemmon and an appreciation of the film.



Romper Stomper

Acorn Media International → R2 DVD
£25



Given current concerns surrounding the rise of the populist Far Right, it seems apt that Australian filmmaker

Geoffrey Wright has returned with a TV series follow-up to his controversial 1992 film following a neo-Nazi gang. Every bit as confrontational and uncomfortable as you'd expect, the six-part series charts a struggle between the white nationalist Patriot Blue group and the extreme-left Antifasc, catching up with characters from the film in the process. While the show looks good on DVD, the Dolby Digital 2.0 audio is a touch limited. Six short *Making of...* featurettes are also included.





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The sexual revolution hits the streets of London



Fans of Rita Tushingham are in for a real treat with this lavish boxset



Top of the (working) class

The BFI refuses to let the bastards grind you down as it serves up a Blu-ray boxset collecting eight films that shook up the stuffy British film industry

→ WOODFALL: A REVOLUTION IN BRITISH CINEMA

At the same time as a new generation of French filmmakers (*La Nouvelle Vague*) were transforming cinema in that country, an upstart British production company was setting out to do the same on these shores. The brainchild of director Tony Richardson, writer John Osborne and producer Harry Saltzman, Woodfall Films came about as a way of bringing Osborne's controversial, but hugely successful, stage play *Look Back in Anger* to the screen.

Directed by Richardson and starring Richard Burton, Woodfall's adaptation of *Look Back in Anger* (1959) didn't achieve anything like the financial success of its source material – and today it all feels a little too melodramatic. However, as the first of the so-called 'Angry Young Man' social realist films, its legacy and influence cannot be understated.

Richardson's next film, *The Entertainer* (1960), has stood the test of time far better. Laurence Olivier stars as Archie Rice, a has-been seafront vaudeville performer still dreaming of the big time and unwilling to accept that the world has moved on around him.

Hitting cinemas just a few months later, director Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and*

Sunday Morning is where Woodfall really hit its stride. Giving Britain its very own 'rebel without a cause', this kitchen sink drama stars Albert Finney as a self-destructive factory worker involved in an affair with the wife of one of his colleagues. Shocking critics of the day with its blunt depiction of working-class life, not to mention its stark handling of taboo topics like abortion, the film was originally released with an 'X' certificate, but today only merits a 'PG'.

As much as Woodfall may be associated with the idea of the 'Angry Young Man', it wasn't averse to exploring female viewpoints that were every bit as socially conscious. The wonderfully poetic *A Taste of Honey* (1961) was the first of these, giving young Rita Tushingham her first lead role as a pregnant teenager trying to make a life for herself in Salford.

An altogether grittier form of rebellion was back centre-stage in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), with Tom Courtenay bristling with barely contained resentment as a juvenile offender whose prowess as a long distance runner sees him being taken under the wing of the Governor at the borstal he is sent to.

Taking a step away from kitchen sink dramas, *Tom Jones* (1963) saw Woodfall trying its hand at period drama, in its own distinctive way, of course. The very definition of the word 'bawdy', this broad comedy



follows the sexual misadventures of Albert Finney's titular 18th century orphan. While it may have won the Oscar for Best Picture, it really hasn't aged well and for all its fourth wall-breaking trickery, comes across like an arty *Carry On...* film.

Note: this BFI boxset includes both the original 128-minute theatrical cut of *Tom Jones* and Tony Richardson's subsequent 121-minute 'Director's Cut'.

Rita Tushingham is front and centre again in *Girl with Green Eyes* (1964), a slightly meandering drama about an idealistic young Irish girl, fresh from convent school, who falls for an older, more sophisticated man going through a divorce. It's not a great film, but Tushingham, as always, is absolutely wonderful.

The boxset's final film, *The Knack ...and How to Get It* (1965) finds Tushingham sharing the screen with Michael Crawford, Ray Brooks and Donal Donnelly in director Richard Lester's complex comic commentary about the sexual revolution, misogyny and gender roles. Funny and progressive, it's a fascinating film, one whose final act feels particularly relevant in the age of the #metoo movement.

Picture: The BFI's nine-disc boxset (each version of *Tom Jones* gets a disc to itself) may derive from a mix of 4K and 2K scans undertaken by different organisations (including Fotokem L.A., the Criterion Collection, Warner Bros. and MGM) from a variety of

source elements, but there's still an impressive consistency to the 1080p presentations.

Greyscale, black levels and brightness across the seven black-and-white films is excellent, ensuring that there's plenty of finely rendered detail on show. Grain is also well resolved, although *The Knack...*'s encode is coarser and shows some print damage.

The sole colour film, *Tom Jones*, also holds up extremely well, with Criterion's 4K scan (used for both cuts) perfectly capturing its muddy palette, gloomy interiors and diffuse aesthetic.

All of the films are presented in a 1.66:1 aspect ratio with the exception of *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, which is framed at 1.77:1.

Audio: The films all feature clean and well-balanced LPCM mono soundtracks, except for the Director's Cut of *Tom Jones*, which was remixed in stereo (again offered in LPCM). The latter is a pretty effective update with clear steering across the L/R spread.

Extras: Fascinating bonus features include new and archival interviews, chat-tracks on two of the films, and a BFI Southbank panel discussion featuring Rita Tushingham, Tom Courtenay, Joely Richardson, playwright Jez Butterworth and journalist Paris Lees. The BFI has also loaded the set with archival shorts and newsreels, to better place the films in context, plus extracts from stage performances.

Woodfall produced 20 films between 1959 and 1984, so there's still scope for at least one more boxset

HCC VERDICT

Woodfall: A Revolution in British Cinema

→ BFI → Region B BD → £80

WE SAY: A key player in the British New Wave finally gets the attention it deserves with this loaded boxset.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Which one of you already finished my crossword?



We're Fuller love for this set

Seven classic films *and* over seven hours of interviews for just £50 – what's not to like?

→ SAMUEL FULLER AT COLUMBIA, 1937-1961

Boutique label Indicator has cooked up yet another Blu-ray boxset that will appeal to discerning film fans, this time dedicated to crime reporter turned no-nonsense filmmaker Sam Fuller.

The set kicks off in atypical style with *It Happened in Hollywood* (1937). Fuller was one of three writers who worked on this hokey comedy about a silent-movie star struggling to adjust to the arrival of sound.

Based on a story by Fuller, *Adventure in Sahara* (1938) plays things straighter with its tale of a pilot joining the Foreign Legion to discover what happened to his dead brother, but is still pretty generic stuff.

Power of the Press (1943) is where things start to get interesting, with Fuller's (worryingly still relevant) Capra-esque story about newspaper bias showing the first real signs of what would follow.

Written by Fuller and directed by Douglas Sirk, *Shockproof* (1949) is a prime piece of pulp that mixes film noir and 'women's picture' to enjoyable effect – although the (studio-mandated) ending almost blows the entire thing.

Adapted from a novel by Fuller, *Scandal Sheet* (1952) is a tense little noir about an up-and-coming journalist at a tabloid newspaper investigating a murder, unaware that his editor is the killer.

Crime thrillers *The Crimson Kimono* (1959) and *Underworld U.S.A.* (1961) were both written and directed by Fuller and find him firing on all cylinders. The former wraps its examination of racism in a



Sam Fuller (above) regularly brought a faux-documentary style to his films

pulpy tale surrounding the murder of a stripper; the latter is a ruthless noir thriller following a broken ex-con's mission to get revenge on the four thugs who slayed his father.

Picture: With a combined running time of just 188 minutes, and with David Mackenzie (see p76) on authoring/encoding duties, the first disc in the set happily accommodates *It Happened in Hollywood*, *Adventure in Sahara* and *Power of the Press*. While the trio of 1.37:1 encodes look good for films of this vintage, they are a little rougher than the latter features. So in addition to the speckling you might expect, *It Happened in Hollywood* exhibits some obvious vertical tram lines, while a few shots in *Power of the Press* suffer from staining.

The second disc hosts 1.37:1 encodes of *Shockproof* and *Scandal Sheet*, and there's a modest uptick in quality seen in both. Yet these pale in comparison to the superb 1.33:1 presentations of *The Crimson Kimono* and *Underworld U.S.A.*, each of which is afforded a disc of its own.

Audio: All seven films feature restored LPCM mono soundtracks. There's nothing here to really get too excited about – but despite a few age-related issues with the earliest films, the overall quality is as good as you could realistically hope for.

Extras: This set isn't graced with Indicator's most comprehensive collection of extras, but the discs port across all of the pre-existing DVD features and add some absolute belters – the best of which is the 408 minutes of unedited interview with Fuller, conducted by Tim Robbins for a 1996 documentary.

HCC VERDICT

Samuel Fuller at Columbia, 1937-1961

→ Indicator → All-region BD
→ £50

WE SAY: Seven movies that chart Fuller's growth as a filmmaker on an excellent Blu-ray boxset.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

The Addiction

Arrow Video → Region B BD
£25



Theological horror meets philosophical debate in director Abel 'Driller Killer' Ferrara's urban vampire film.

Shot in stark black-and-white, this 1995 film has undergone a new 4K restoration from the original 35mm negative for this Blu-ray and the resulting 1.85:1 Full HD imagery delivers rich detail, immaculate blacks and accurately rendered grain. The low-key soundtrack has also been cleaned up and is provided in both LPCM 2.0 stereo and DTS-HD MA 5.1 versions. Constructive extras include a typically expletive-laden chat-track from Ferrara and a retrospective documentary.



Neon Bull

Second Run → All-region BD
£20



This stylish, surreal and sexually charged drama follows macho bull wrangler Iremar (Juliana Cazarre), who works for a touring rodeo but dreams of becoming a fashion designer in his spare time. This striking, if unusual, Brazilian film arrives on Blu-ray with an excellent 2.40:1-framed 1080p encode that switches seamlessly between the more naturalistic world of the rodeo and several colour-saturated, dream-like interludes featuring the titular figure. Backing up the exquisite visuals is a superb DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Extras include a 25-minute *Making of...* and a 32-minute chat with the director.



Iron Monkey

Eureka Entertainment → Region B BD
& R2 DVD → £20



A masked bandit makes life difficult for corrupt officials in this hugely entertaining Hong Kong variation on the Robin

Hood myth from director Yuen Woo-ping. While it may be 25 years old now, *Iron Monkey's* fight choreography still takes your breath away and Eureka's Blu-ray shows it off to the best of the format's abilities. In addition to a superb new 2K restoration of the full 90-minute cut of the film, the disc serves up a choice of Mandarin, Cantonese and English lossless audio (5.1 and 2.0), and ports over all of the interviews (but not the chat-track) from the old Hong Kong Legends DVD.



Mind Ripper

88 Films → Region B BD
£13



Originally planned as *The Hills Have Eyes 3* (and still released in some territories under that title), this 1995

straight-to-video shocker from the pen of Jonathan (son of Wes) Craven finds Lance Henriksen and a young Giovanni Ribisi pursued by a brain-munching mutant in a secret underground bunker. Although the film itself is pretty so-so, it looks and sounds much better than expected on BD thanks to a crisp 1.78:1 1080p encode and spacious DTS-HD MA stereo sonics. However, a lengthy new interview with Jonathan Craven turns out to be the disc's real ace in the hole.



Close encounters of the weird kind

An array of entertaining extras are the real highlight of this bonkers B-movie's Blu-ray release

→ XTRO: LIMITED EDITION

Three years after his father Sam (Philip Sayer) disappeared in mysterious circumstances, young Tony (Simon Nash) starts having nightmares about the event – much to the consternation of his mother Rachel (Bernice Stegers). Elsewhere, a vicious alien attacks a woman in the English countryside, resulting in her giving birth to a full-grown man: Sam!

Attempting to describe the plot of this 1982 sci-fi shocker is an exercise in futility. While there's an underlying idea of a weird extra-terrestrial *Kramer vs. Kramer*, with a human mother and reborn alien father vying for their child's future, this is little more than a wafer-thin thread used to support a series of outlandish set-pieces. The result is like a bizarre fever dream involving various gloopy aliens, psychic powers, an evil midget clown, a life-size killer Action Man and even a sexy French au pair (Maryam D'Arbo).

The very fact that it doesn't make a lick of sense just helps make *Xtro* so oddly endearing. It's not a good film by any stretch of the imagination, but it is completely unlike anything else you'll see – and that alone makes it worth a look.

Picture: The first of the disc's two 1.78:1-framed 1080p encodes (used for the *Original Ending*, *Alternate Ending* and *Original UK Video* versions via the magic of seamless branching) is surprisingly good, with reasonable detailing and warm colours – although contrast sometimes runs a little hot.

Second Sight also let director Harry Bromley Davenport 'mess around with the colour and that



kind of thing' for a new 2018 *Director's Version*. The result is a mess of cheesy digital effects and overdone colour correction that completely crushes blacks while overheating everything else. It is, quite simply, unwatchable.

Audio: The original soundtrack is presented in DTS-HD MA 1.0 and 2.0 dual-mono incarnations depending on which version of the film you choose. All sound perfectly clean and clear, and really expose the full horror of the film's terrible synth score.

Extras: *Xploring Xtro* (57 minutes) is one of the funniest and most honest *Making of...* docs you'll ever see. *The World of Xtro* (27 minutes) sees a fan giving a passionate defence of the film. *Beyond Xtro* (seven minutes) looks at the two existing sequels before presenting test footage from a planned fourth film. *Loving the Alien* (four minutes) pays tribute to the late Philip Sayer. There's also a 2005 interview with the director, the trailer and the CD soundtrack. >



Iconic robotic 'dancers' Tik and Tok were hired to bring *Xtro's* alien and oversized toy soldier to life

HCC VERDICT

Xtro: Limited Edition

→ Second Sight → All-region BD
→ £30

WE SAY: Baffling British sci-fi/horror schlock backed up by some highly entertaining bonus goodies.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

From London with Love

This British cop caper lacks the budget to match its ambitions, but still raises a smile

→ BULLETPROOF: SEASON ONE

National Crime Agency detectives Bishop (Noel Clarke) and Pike (Ashley Walters) bicker and banter their way around the mean streets of East London while apprehending jewel thieves, car hijackers and drug smugglers in this Sky Original series directed by Nick Love.

Bulletproof was presumably pitched as *Bad Boys* meets *The Sweeney*, but is hampered to an extent by its obvious budget limitations and 45-minute-per-episode running time. While the show delights in packing in car-chase/shootout set-pieces, and Love works hard to make these sequences thrill, there's always the nagging sense that everything ought to feel bigger and bolder. Storylines, meanwhile, move along at pace – sometimes so quickly that their resolutions feel a bit perfunctory.

That said, the chemistry between Clarke and Walters (who also created the series) is excellent, and their interplay yields some genuine laughs. Their characters are also quite deeply drawn, with personal background issues adding additional long-running drama to the villain-of-the-week stories (as does a full narrative arc established in episode two). The supporting cast, including Clarke Peters (*The Wire*) and *EastEnders* alumna Lyndsey Coulson, is solid.

Overall, *Bulletproof* is hit and miss in terms of tone, structure and production, but its old-school approach actually feels like a breath of fresh air. With so much contemporary TV favouring largescale drama and fantasy/sci-fi trappings, seeing two coppers chase down a thug, read him his rights and make a comedy



quip has its merits. Sky has already pledged to make a second series, and we'll probably tune in.

Picture: *Bulletproof* is available in 4K via Sky Boxsets and looks rather good. As expected, much of the colour palette is generally drab, favouring greys and blues (Canning Town doesn't present much opportunity for *Bad Boys*-style sun-drenched vistas), but there's rich detail. Love's cinematography and eye for a location impress; in place of the central London shots that crowd Hollywood blockbusters, you're given a tour of the city's rusting, litter-strewn concrete underbelly. At times, it's quite beautiful.

Audio: Atmos mixes (delivered via Dolby Digital+) don't show much in terms of creativity, but enrich the onscreen image with good fidelity and surround ambience. Car engines throb and thrust, gunshots ring out with slam and clarity, and the expletive-fuelled dialogue is (with one or two exceptions) easy to follow.



In *Bulletproof* land, there's little that can't be solved by waving a gun about

HCC VERDICT

Bulletproof: Season One

→ Sky Boxsets

WE SAY: Only due for a DVD release, Sky's streams are the best way to catch this retro buddy-cop drama.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Cloak & Dagger's first season will run to 10 episodes

→ CLOAK & DAGGER: SEASON ONE

→ Amazon Prime Video

The Marvel Cinematic Universe may be an unstoppable box office juggernaut, but for less cookie-cutter Marvel fare you need to turn your attention to TV. From Netflix's *Daredevil*-verse, through Hulu's genre-mash-up *Runaways*, to Fox's *Legion*, it's here that comic book properties are breaking the mould. And now we get *Cloak & Dagger*, exclusive to Amazon Prime in the UK. It may be an ABC Studios production, but this show is streets apart from *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*

The characters were born in the pages of *Spectacular Spider-Man* back in the 1980s, but this is no obvious superhero frolic. It's tonally similar to 2006 breakout hit *Heroes* (perhaps unsurprising given it's written by that show's Joe Pokaski). The tone is young adult, and doesn't shy away from gritty themes.

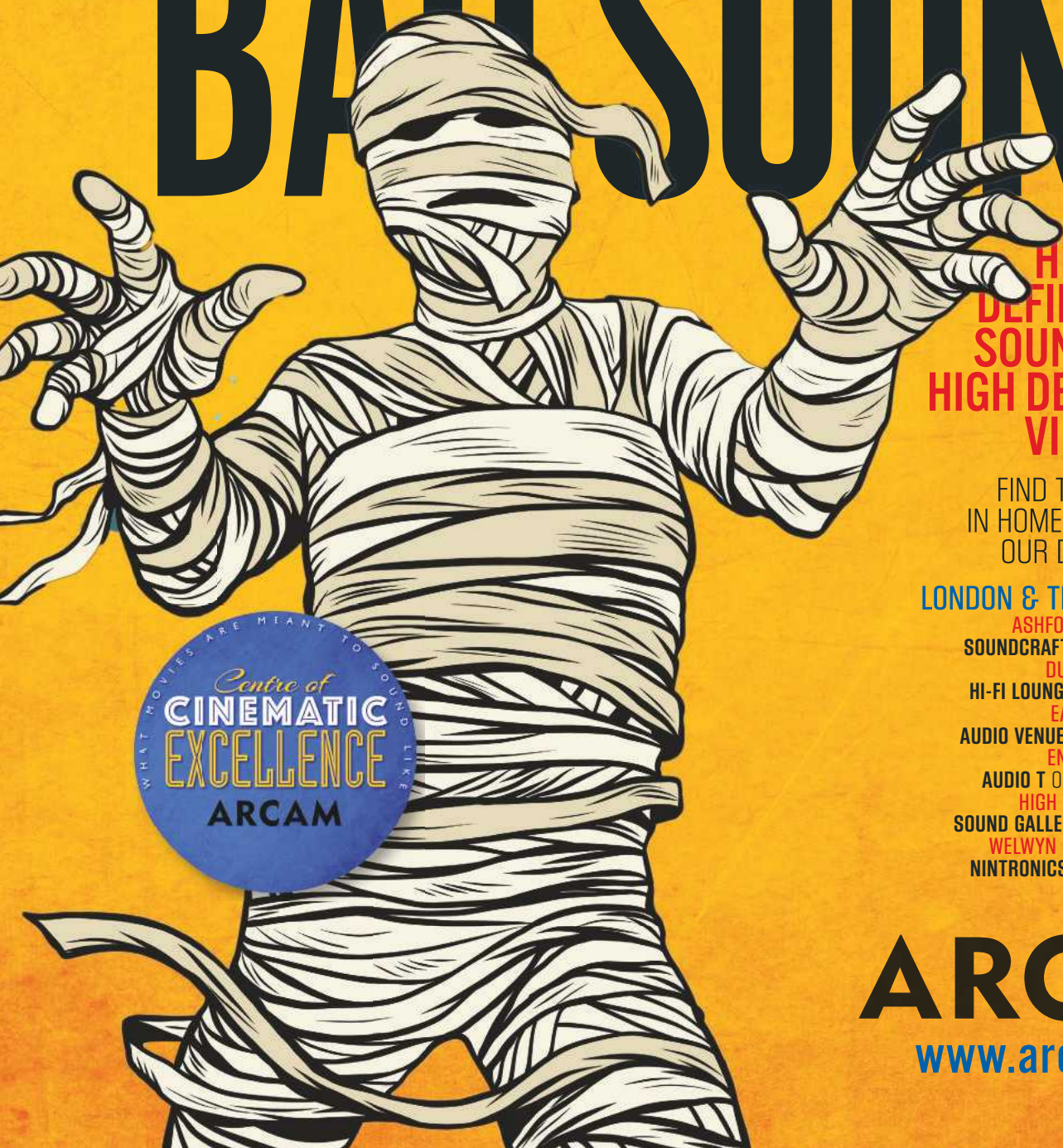
Tyrone Johnson and Tandy Bowen are the titular teens, essentially representing polar opposites of

light and dark. One has the ability to teleport, disappearing into wisps of black smoke, the other creates daggers of light. The opening episodes largely keep the two separate, and it says much for stars Aubrey Joseph and Olivia Holt that their stories have emotional clout. This is a character-driven show, at least on the episodes seen so far – although where it really surprises is in its non-linear approach to storytelling. The narrative time-jumps with increasing confidence.

Cloak & Dagger is a good-looking TV drama, presented on Amazon in 1080p SDR. Visual effects are actually quite low-key, and the photography is refreshingly unstylised. The 5.1 sound design is immersive when it needs to be (nightclubs pound in surround), but for the most part settles for a stereo spread. So while not demo material by any stretch of the imagination, it doesn't disappoint.



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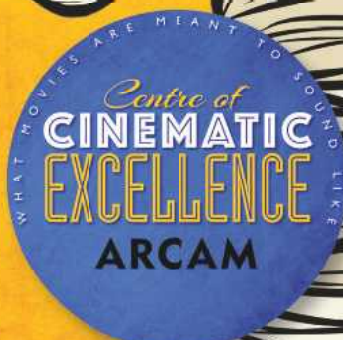
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In celebration of *Jurassic Park* and *The Matrix* hitting Ultra HD Blu-ray, **Team HCC** rounds up another 10 landmark movies in the development of cinematic special effects...

THE LOST WORLD

Arriving in cinemas almost 70 years ahead of *Jurassic Park*, this 1925 silent bigscreen adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel tells the story of an expedition to an unexplored South American plateau that turns out to be the home of countless prehistoric creatures. Just like Spielberg's later blockbuster, *The Lost World* revolutionised cinematic visual trickery, dazzling audiences with Willis H. O'Brien's pioneering stop-motion dinosaurs.

Get it: Due to its age, *The Lost World* is now in the public domain, so you could just track down a ropey-looking version online. However, to enjoy the film at its best you should import Flicker Alley's 2017 all-region US Blu-ray, which sports a 2K restoration incorporating around eight minutes of rediscovered scenes and special effects sequences.



YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES

This 1985 curio directed by Barry Levinson mixes up its high-concept antics with some groundbreaking visual sequences (the plot centres around hallucinogenic poison). The standout moment is John Lasseter's CG animation of a murderous stain-glass knight...

Get it: Paramount Pictures hasn't yet dug this out of the vault for a Blu-ray release, leaving fans stuck with a barebones DVD. This is the sort of crime Sherlock Holmes should be investigating.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 Biblical blockbuster (an even more lavish remake of his 1923 silent epic) beat *Forbidden Planet* to scoop that year's Special Effects Oscar. The film's crowning highlight is the parting of the Red Sea, which reportedly took special effects supervisor John P. Fulton and his team six months to shoot.

Get it: The US Ultimate Collector's Edition boxset contains both the 1956 and 1923 films spread across a trio of (all-region) Blu-rays, plus a host of collectibles.



THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD

The first (and best) entry in Ray Harryhausen's Sinbad trilogy, this 1958 fantasy spectacular boasts some of the stop-motion wizard's most memorable creations.

Get it: The undoubted high point of Indicator's *The Sinbad Trilogy* Blu-ray boxset is the gorgeous 4K restoration of *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (the other two films are based on older 2K scans). Be aware, however, that the label has revealed that its stock of the limited edition boxset is now running extremely low.



THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON

David Fincher's 2008 romantic fantasy will make you believe that you're watching Brad Pitt age in reverse thanks to its seamless combination of state-of-the-art make-up FX and visual tinkering.

Get it: Warner Bros.' two-disc UK release is almost identical to the Region A-locked US Criterion set, aside from the choice of VC-1 and Dolby TrueHD encoding over the latter's AVC and DTS-HD MA. Disc-based extras across both releases are identical.



MARY POPPINS

It may have lost out to *My Fair Lady* in the Best Picture stakes, but Disney's magical musical-fantasy deservedly scooped the first Oscar for Best Special Visual Effects thanks in large part to a bravura sequence that sees Mary, Bert and the Banks children travel into a drawing. This marvellously inventive set-piece (a mash-up of live-action and animation) still impresses today, and paved the way for future films such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

Get it: Zavvi released a Steelbook version of Disney's superb Blu-ray in 2014.



STAR WARS

In order to make his 1977 sci-fi come to life as he had envisioned, George Lucas assembled a VFX department, dubbed Industrial Light & Magic, which set to work pioneering new modelling and camera techniques. Its skill is there to see right from the movie's opening Star Destroyer vs Blockade Runner chase.

Get it: The out-of-print Limited Edition DVD is the only way to get hold of the original 1977 version of the film, rather than the CG 'enhanced' version that's on Blu-ray.



THE ABYSS

In the same year that Atari wowed gamers with the chunky polygons in its *Hard Drivin'* arcade game (1989), James Cameron and the visual effects maestros at ILM dazzled cinema audiences with the digitally-created watery alien pseudopod tentacle and its face-changing 'morphing' abilities in this sub-aquatic sci-fi thriller.

Get it: Cameron is apparently too busy making *Avatar* sequels to sign off *The Abyss* on Blu-ray, 4K or otherwise. This means fans are stuck with the old DVD – but as the UK disc is cut, you may want to import an uncut version from elsewhere.



KING KONG

As impressive as Willis H. O'Brien's stop-motion creations for *The Lost World* were, they pale in comparison to the titular character in this 1933 creature-feature. Going beyond a mere special effect, O'Brien somehow turns Kong into a living, breathing beast who proves to be a more sympathetic character than any of the supporting – human – cast. All the other Kongs that followed (and there have been a fair few) haven't quite reached the same heights.

Get it: Pick up the HMV-exclusive Premium Collection Blu-ray for its terrific encode and superb extras.

TOP PICK



JOHN CARPENTER'S THE THING

While the horror genre is regularly at the forefront of special effects, it's typically overlooked by awards organisations and snuffy critics because of its troublesome subject matter. Nowhere is that more clearly shown than with John Carpenter's 1982 remake of *The Thing from Another World*, which went back to the source novella (*Who Goes There?*) and used icky state-of-the-art practical effects to create the story's shape-changing alien – much to the horror of critics of the day. The fact that Spielberg's *E.T.* won the Best Visual Effects Oscar that year is no surprise, but that *The Thing* wasn't even nominated is nothing less than a travesty.

Get it: Arrow's out-of-print Limited Edition Blu-ray is the definitive release of this horror masterpiece.

Have you missed a copy of *Home Cinema Choice*? You can now order these online

Issue No.276

Issue No.277

Issue No.278

Issue No.279

Issue No.280

Issue No.281

Issue No.282

Issue No.283

Issue No.284

Issue No.285

Issue No.286

Issue No.287

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SELECT

→ **GEAR GUIDE** **TELEVISIONS** From entry-level 40in LEDs to flagship 4K monsters
BLU-RAY PLAYERS Which deck rules the roost? **PROJECTORS** It's time to blow up your video!
AV RECEIVERS 5.1, 7.1, 11.2 – we've got all the options covered **SPEAKERS** Killer surround sound setups
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to help

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

TOP 15 Televisions

01

**Samsung QE65Q9FN** → £3,800 ★★★★★

Revised QLED technology and the implementation of a local dimming backlight reap astonishing picture quality rewards with this bright, colourful 4K HDR hero. Great usability and smart platform, too. *HCC #285*

TOP 5 Blu-ray movies

**Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle**

Enjoyable reboot/sequel to the '90s family flick, with Dwayne Johnson leading the cast. A reference-grade 1080p image is joined by active DTS-HD MA sonics – but no Atmos. *HCC #285*

★★★★★

**Star Wars: The Last Jedi [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

Rian Johnson delivers another slice of sci-fi spectacular that sees the franchise move in an unexpected new direction. The 4K platter marries Dolby Atmos with Dolby Vision. *HCC #285*

★★★★★

**The Greatest Showman [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

Roll up! Roll up! Hugh Jackman leads the cast of this rousing musical based on the life of circus master P.T. Barnum. Superb AV presentation and fun extras. *HCC #286*

★★★★★

**Blade of the Immortal**

The latest film from prolific Japanese director Miike Takashi is a riveting Samurai actioner bookended by audacious fight scenes. Arrow's BD offers solid AV quality and a real wealth of bonus bits. *HCC #285*

★★★★★

**The Commuter**

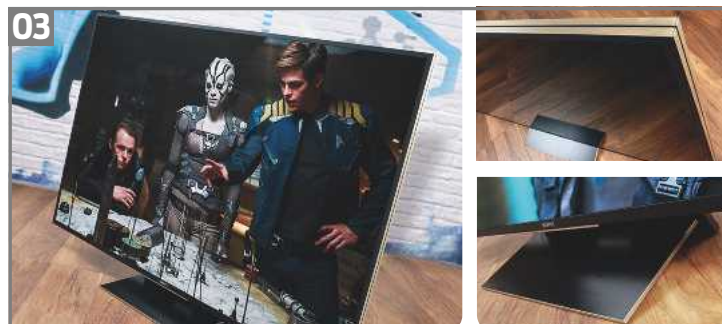
Another team up between Liam Neeson and director Jaume Collet-Serra, another Hitchcockian slice of B-movie entertainment. This looks and sounds good on BD, but the extras are pitiful. *HCC #286*

★★★★★



LG OLED65E8 → £4,300 ★★★★★

This Dolby Vision-enabled OLED boosts image quality on last year's E7 (it's brighter, for one thing), although its Atmos sonics are a tad less impressive. Tidy design and excellent UI. *HCC #287*



Sony KD-65ZD9 → £3,000 ★★★★★

Full-array LED TV (with advanced local dimming tech) that claims a 1,800-nit peak brightness and DV support. Cinematic, sublime pictures – the 100in version [*HCC #282*] is even more impressive. *HCC #267*



Samsung QE55Q9F

→ £2,800 ★★★★★

Save a chunk of money by shopping for Samsung's flagship QLED TV at 55in size. Again, the 4K HDR performance here is superb, with efficient light control, excellent native brightness and rich, wide colour. *HCC #286*



Sony KD-55A1

→ £2,800 ★★★★★

Another Sony set due a Dolby Vision upgrade, this 55in OLED dazzles with its image quality (including superb motion processing), hidden Acoustic Surface speaker technology and eye-catching styling. *HCC #275*



Panasonic TX-55EZ952

→ £2,000 ★★★★★

A 55in OLED TV with an effortlessly naturalistic performance, although not as bright as some rivals. Gorgeous, understated design and premium build quality. *HCC #277*



Sony KD-55XF9005

→ £1,700 ★★★★★

Impressive backlighting, dynamic HDR images and top-quality motion processing are the major draws of this mid-tier Bravia. Android OS still needs improvement, though. *HCC #285*



Philips 55POS9002

→ £2,000 ★★★★★

Philips' second-gen Android-powered OLED takes a more refined approach to its processing, focusing on balanced cinematic imagery. Ambilight, as usual, boosts your immersion. *HCC #276*



Samsung UE49MU7000

→ £750 ★★★★★

Not one of Samsung's top-flight TVs, but a cracking mid-range 49in model that presents 4K and HD material with bright, rich colours and stable blacks. Good choice for an affordable setup. *HCC #277*



Panasonic TX-65EX750

→ £1,500 ★★★★★

A (surprise!) 3D-capable LED screen that offers well-controlled backlighting, pleasing 4K clarity and good HD upscaling. Not the brightest around, and some colour inconsistencies. *HCC #279*



Loewe Bild 3.55

→ £2,800 ★★★★★

Loewe's entry-level 55in OLED TV offers an artful fusion of design and performance (with decent sonics). Not the best selection of integrated smarts, though, and some rivals are cheaper. *HCC #283*



Sony KD-55XE8596

→ £900 ★★★★★

A real 4K bargain, combining a 55in screen with a solid picture performance. HDR doesn't zing due to a lack of sheer brightness, but it benefits from backlight stability. Impressive with regular HD, too. *HCC #278*



LG 55SJ850V

→ £900 ★★★★★

Backlight distractions hinder this set's performance in low-lit rooms, but it's a strong all-rounder, offering Dolby Vision HDR, WebOS smarts, well-rounded sonics and a bargain price tag. *HCC #276*



Hisense 55U7A

→ £800 ★★★★★

FIFA-branded 4K HDR flatscreen that makes up for a lack of HDR brightness through its image clarity and solid black levels. Strong audio and a clutter-free smart platform sweeten the deal. *HCC #288*



Hitachi 75HL16T64U

→ £1,350 ★★★★★

This 75in megascreen offers a lot of 4K image for not a lot of money. Predictably, picture quality can't match that of big-brand rivals – but the TV holds appeal if you're mainly after an SDR display. *HCC #285*

TOP 15 Speakers

01



Bowers & Wilkins 700 Series 5.1

→ £3,800 ★★★★★

This array finds the larger models in the 700 Series proving their mettle with formidable power and precision, an expressive mid-band and detailed highs. Excellent. HCC #285

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Photo courtesy of Gary J. Fernandez Limited



02 Wharfedale DX-2 → £450 ★★★★★

The asking price of this 5.1 system will tell you it doesn't offer the last word in surround sound fidelity, but Wharfedale's package is compact, well made and faultlessly delivers on its home-cinema-on-a-budget promise. *HCC #283*



03 Monitor Audio Gold 300AV → £7,150 ★★★★★

MA revamped its Gold Series and we paid serious attention. This big-ticket package excels across the frequency range, offers exquisite design and packs setup flexibility via the dipole/monopole FX surrounds. *HCC #251*



03 KEF Q Series 5.1.2 → £3,300 ★★★★★

KEF's revamped Q Series now offers Atmos modules for an up-to-the-minute sonic experience. Big, bold-looking speakers. Robust, immersive audio. *HCC #280*



04 KEF R Series 7.1 → £6,500 ★★★★★

A 7.1 set mixing dipolar and direct surrounds, this package takes its cues from KEF's Blade and offers faultless, largescale home cinema sonics. *HCC #217*



05 ATC HTS7 5.1 → £3,500 ★★★★★

Brit brand ATC rejigs the driver tech and neutral sound of its SCM range into a wall-mountable, flexible system perfect for discreet AV setups. *HCC #275*



06 Q Acoustics 3050i → £1,350 ★★★★★

This update on the previous 3000 series makes subtle performance and styling improvements. The result is an excellent, well-priced, stylish package. *HCC #287*



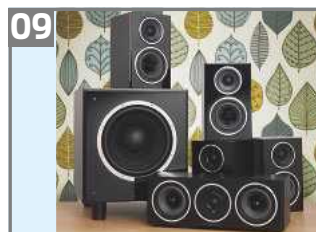
07 Monitor Audio Silver 500 5.1 → £3,650 ★★★★★

The new Silver range offers a potent EQ-able sub, sweet design, dipole surrounds and largescale, nuanced sonics. Atmos upfiring models would be nice, though. *HCC #282*



08 Acoustic Energy 100 Series 5.1 → £1,300 ★★★★★

Acoustic Energy's latest addition scores well on style, ease of install and price, and puts in a consistently entertaining multichannel performance. *HCC #286*



09 Wharfedale Diamond 11 HCP → £800 ★★★★★

Bookshelf speakers and 10in sub combine in a system that offers mid-range and treble finesse and a healthy dollop of boisterous bass. Fun and affordable. *HCC #279*



10 Q Acoustics 7000i 5.1 Slim → £1,000 ★★★★★

Consistent tonality and detail retrieval are the standout elements here, joined by a cute, easy-to-accommodate design – particularly the 7060S sub. *HCC #284*



11 Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1.2 → £1,200 ★★★★★

Enjoyable-sounding and well-priced sub/sat system with Atmos upfiring in front L/R enclosures. Not the smallest 'satellite' speakers around. *HCC #276*



12 Polk Signature Series 5.1 → £1,450 ★★★★★

Largescale performance from a well-priced floorstanding system with slimmed-down centre enclosure. Upfront and boisterous sound; a great entertainer. *HCC #273*



13 DALI Opticon 5.1 → £3,200 ★★★★★

The Opticons employ driver designs from DALI's high-end models, and showcase a talent for involving music presentation and thrilling home cinema. *HCC #260*



14 Piega TMicro 5.1 → £4,000 ★★★★★

An expensive but classy package for those seeking high style in their home cinema, with a focus on clear, smooth and cohesive sonics. *HCC #283*

TOP 10 Projectors



01 Sony VPL-VW760ES → £15,000 ★★★★★

This premium beamer adds laser illumination to Sony's 4K SXRD projection technology, and the results are staggering. It's not super-bright, but images are detailed, vivid and supremely well-balanced. Worthy of flagship status. HCC #283



02 JVC DLA-X5900 → £4,000 ★★★★★

An outstanding performer at this price point. JVC's latest D-ILA model may lack native 4K silicon but its eShift 4K engine shows real improvement and HDR playback has been greatly boosted too. A compelling home cinema PJ. HCC #282



03 Optoma UHD51 → £1,500 ★★★★★

This affordable 4K DLP model adds 3D playback (at 1080p) to its home cinema repertoire, making it an obvious upgrade for stereoscopy fans. Sharp, colour-rich and dynamic visuals. HCC #287



04 Sony VPL-VW360ES → £7,000 ★★★★★

In Sony's 4K range between the laser-based VW760ES and entry-level 260ES you'll find this accomplished beamer. Excellent imagery with both SDR and HDR. Motorised controls. HCC #284



05 Vivitek HK2288 → £2,500 ★★★★★

The Taiwanese brand returns to the UK with a 4K DLP PJ that balances impressive HDR brightness with stable images. Excellent remote control and decent zoom and throw options. HCC #285



06 Optoma UHZ65 → £5,000 ★★★★★

The asking price here reflects Optoma's addition of laser illumination (yielding improved contrast and far greater 'lamp' life) to the DLP 4K and HDR playback talents of its stablemates. HCC #282



07 Acer VL7860 → £3,500 ★★★★★

Laser 4K DLP projector that misses out on the contrast performance of some models, but undercuts them in terms of pricing. Use the Silent mode for whisper-quiet operation. HCC #284



08 Sony VPL-VW260ES → £5,200 ★★★★★

Sony's base-level 4K PJ comes with a few strings attached (brightness and colour range are limited), but it's a tempter for anyone spec'ing a UHD theatre. HCC #280



09 Epson EH-TW7300 → £2,200 ★★★★★

Similar performance traits to its bigger EH-TW9300 sibling, but with reductions in max brightness (and claimed contrast). 4K upscaler, rather than native, with HDR playback. HCC #269



10 BenQ W1050 → £500 ★★★★★

There are a few cut corners on this budget DLP 1080p model (no backlight on the remote, no lens shift, a meagre zoom), but overall movie performance is good for the money. HCC #283

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TOP 10 Blu-rays

01



Oppo UDP-203 → £650 ★★★★★

Oppo debuted 4K with a superb universal design including Dolby Vision HDR. Packed with user adjustments and connectivity. No apps or Darbee processing, and the brand has now withdrawn from the BD market. HCC #269

02



Oppo UDP-205 → £1,400 ★★★★★

This pricey, peerless UHD deck flaunts universal disc playback, asynchronous USB input, headphone amp and balanced stereo outs amongst its audiophile features. One for musos, and you may struggle to find it for sale now. HCC #274

03



Sony UBP-X800

→ £270 ★★★★★

Sony embraces UHD Blu-ray with a full-width, sturdy design that'll also spin DVD-A and SACD platters. A great all-rounder, but no current Dolby Vision support or word on an update. HCC #274

04



Panasonic DMP-UB900

→ £370 ★★★★★

The Ultra HD Blu-ray format got an inspiring debut in Panasonic's multi-talented deck that offers a sterling picture performance, 4K-enabled VOD apps and analogue audio outs. No DV. HCC #259

05



Sony UBP-X700

→ £250 ★★★★★

A compact player promised a DV update this Summer, the UBP-X700 has a nondescript design, no analogue outs and a stubby remote. But it plays great, and offers SACD support. HCC #284

06



Cambridge Audio CXUHD

→ £800 ★★★★★

The lack of analogue outputs is a surprise considering CA's heritage, but this universal (and DV-capable) deck sounds sweet over its digital outs. As with Oppo's UDP-203, a MediaTek SoC is used. HCC #279

07



Panasonic DMP-UB700

→ £300 ★★★★★

Shorn of some of the audiophile niceties of the UB900 (including multichannel analogue outputs), but still a safe pair of hands with your 4K BDs. And at a bargain price. HCC #270

08



Panasonic DMP-UB300

→ £130 ★★★★★

Great 4K imagery from this bargain deck, but you might prefer to up your budget for the UB700 – no split HDMI, optical/coaxial or Wi-Fi connections here. Half-size design for an easy install. HCC #272

09



Samsung UBD-K8500

→ £180 ★★★★★

Debut Ultra HD Blu-ray player that finds fans courtesy of its sensible price point (now even lower), connected smarts and eye-catching visuals. Build quality is a little uninspiring. HCC #260

10



Samsung UBD-M9500

→ £230 ★★★★★

Second-gen 4K player that adds features (mobile BD streaming, 360-degree image support) but removes 3D playback capability. As before, the chassis is curved. UHD discs look pin-sharp. HCC #275



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Photo courtesy of Gary J. Fernandez Limited

TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors

01

**Denon AVR-X6400H** → £2,100 ★★★★★

This receiver's 11 channels of power are joined by Atmos, DTS:X and integrated Auro-3D, plus HEOS multiroom integration, making it peerlessly flexible. Sound delivery is quick-footed and articulate. A superb one-box solution. *HCC #280*

02

**Arcam AVR850** → £4,500 ★★★★★

High-end seven-channel AVR marrying Class G amplification and Atmos (and future DTS:X) support with talented Dirac Live Room EQ. 11-channel pre-outs for full-fat setups. *HCC #257*

03

**Denon AVC-X8500H** → £3,300 ★★★★★

For those who want to go even bigger with their Atmos/DTS:X system, this flagship provides 13 channels of power. Setup can be complex, and there's no FM tuner, but otherwise this is first-class. *HCC #285*

04

**Trinnov Altitude16** → £13,000 ★★★★★

High-end 16-channel processor dazzles with its Optimizer room/speaker calibration tech. Balanced outputs for compatible amplifiers. Reference-grade sound quality. *HCC #287*

05

**Marantz NR1608** → £600 ★★★★★

With a smoother sound signature than before and the addition of HEOS multiroom, Marantz's 7.1-channel slim-line AVR flies the flag for living-room friendly AV. Only one HDMI out, though. *HCC #278*

06

**Sony STR-DN1080** → £550 ★★★★★

Sony is back in the AVR game with a first Atmos model that adds worthy phantom rear speaker processing to its 5.1.2 sonics. A few UI niggles don't take much of the shine off an impressive budget buy. *HCC #277*

07

**Marantz SR8012** → £2,700 ★★★★★

Marantz joins the 11-channel arms race with an AVR that benefits from a beefed-up power stage. As with the Denon X6400H, format support includes Auro-3D. Sophisticated sonics. *HCC #284*

08

**NAD T 777 V3** → £2,500 ★★★★★

Dirac-enabled seven-channel AV receiver (with 11-channel processing). Powerful, even-handed sonics and wonderfully easy to use, but a firmware update is still awaited for DTS:X decoding. *HCC #285*

09

**Yamaha RX-A3070** → £1,600 ★★★★★

Currently Yamaha's most potent receiver, this nine-channel model is packed with features and performs solidly, but a GUI/remote control upgrade would be welcome. *HCC #286*

10

**Denon HEOS AVR** → £800 ★★★★★

Able to run wireless rears/sub (using HEOS models) and sporting a display-free design, this is a five-channel AVR with a different approach. One for HEOS devotees only. *HCC #276*

TOP 5 Bonus features

**mother! The Downward Spiral**

Darren Aronofsky's off-beat psychological thriller isn't for everyone, but this doc provides fascinating insight into the film's conception, planning and 16mm capture. *HCC #282*

★★★★★

**Kingsman: Inside the Golden Circle**

A near two-hour doc, split into nine parts, is perhaps more than this hit-n-miss sequel deserves, but there's plenty of info and insight here into K2's production. *HCC #283*

★★★★★

**Thor Ragnarok: Director's Commentary**

Taika Waititi delivers an oddball, frequently hilarious chat track that fits this movie's anarchic nature well. A fine solo effort, albeit with an unexpected guest star... *HCC #284*

★★★★★

**The Director and the Jedi**

This 95-minute *Making of...* documentary is the must-see extra on *The Last Jedi*'s BD. More than just a typical overview of the film's production, this is skilfully edited and utterly absorbing. *HCC #285*

★★★★★

**You Must Remember This: The Warner Bros. Story**

The 480i image isn't great, but this 289-minute film charting WB's rise to the top of Hollywood is a brilliant addition to the *Casablanca: Premium Collection* BD. *HCC #284*

★★★★★

TOP 10 Subwoofers



01 SVS SB-2000 → £800 ★★★★★

This follow up to the SB-1000 offers immense value for money. A mid-sized woofer that imbues Blu-rays with quick, taut and potent LFE, it's a perfect introduction to what a truly good sub can accomplish. HCC #233



02 REL No.25 → £6,500 ★★★★★

REL celebrates its 25th anniversary in style with this 15in/1,000W premium concoction that exhibits exhilarating speed and nuance down to serious depths. Big, but beautiful. HCC #271



03 Bowers & Wilkins DB1D

→ £3,750 ★★★★★

This sequel to the DB1 moves EQ to an app and changes driver/amp design. Beautifully controlled performance with depth and detail. Gorgeous bodywork. HCC #277



04 JL Audio Fathom f212v2

→ £6,500 ★★★★★

A second outing for JL's 2 x 12in monster, with an increase in power (3,600W) and room EQ improvements among the changes. Sounds as good as you'd imagine. HCC #261



05 SVS SB16-Ultra

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes low but remains tight and fast. App-assisted EQ and operation. HCC #270



06 REL HT/1003

→ £500 ★★★★★

REL targets film fans with a 10in sub that drops its usual simultaneous high/low-level input to hit a new price point. Power and speed are its strengths. HCC #286



07 REL T7i

→ £850 ★★★★★

Easy to house 8in sub (with 10in passive driver). Decent LF extension joined by superb speed. Wireless transmission via optional (£200) system. HCC #277



08 SVS SB-4000

→ £1,800 ★★★★★

Similar in operation and styling to the SB16-Ultra flagship, but smaller and more affordable. Superior DSP results in a real sense of control. HCC #284



09 GoldenEar SuperSub X

→ £1,450 ★★★★★

Four drivers squeezed into a relatively compact design and given plenty of push from a 1,400W amp. Standout traits are impact and depth. HCC #272



10 KEF Kube10b

→ £600 ★★★★★

The middle option of KEF's new Kube range packs a 10in driver, 300W Class D amp and 56-bit DSP engine to maintain efficient low-frequency control. HCC #283

TOP 5 Console games



God of War

An HDR showcase for both PS4 and PS4 Pro (and playable in upscaled 4K on the latter), this action/puzzler is massive in scope and, in the Leviathan Axe, features perhaps the best weapon in gaming! HCC #286

★★★★★



Call of Duty: WWII

Eschewing the more fantastical elements of recent COD entries and giving greater emphasis to tactics and staying alive, this is a reminder of why the FPS franchise is so well loved. Superb sound FX, too. HCC #282

★★★★★



Monster Hunter: World

This series breaks out of its Nintendo origins to offer PS4/Xbox One owners varied, open-world gameplay, plus HDR and better-than-HD visuals that can be tailored to your desire. Monstrous fun. HCC #283

★★★★★



Super Mario Odyssey

Mario returns in this standout title for Nintendo's Switch console that endows its platforming fun with superior game mechanics, eye-popping visuals and a foot-tapping score. A genuine masterpiece. HCC #280

★★★★★



Far Cry 5

A cautious update on its predecessor, but there's still plenty of fun gameplay to be had in this open-world first-person shooter. Plays in native 4K HDR on Xbox One X, and better-than-HD on PS4 Pro. HCC #285

★★★★★

TOP 10 Accessories



01 KEF R50 → £600 ★★★★★

KEF's Dolby Atmos-enabled reflective modules are a smart choice to beef up a system. Using the company's Uni-Q point source drivers pays dividends, enabling full-range sonics that reach deep into your cinema room. First-rate build. *HCC #252*



03



Amazon Echo Dot

→ £50 ★★★★★

Less impressive as a standalone speaker than its larger sibling, but more affordable. Use its 3.5mm output and Bluetooth to pair with third-party kit. Fun AI experience. A real bargain. *HCC #269*

04



Nvidia Shield Android TV

→ £180 ★★★★★

The Android-based streamer/gaming box gets a gentle revamp – same silicon, neater design, new features including future support for Google Assistant. Slick and easy to use. *HCC #272*

05



Roku Streaming Stick+

→ £70 ★★★★★

If a simple life is your aim, this content-rich, 4K/HDR-capable dongle from the streaming specialist is your friend. Idiot-proof interface and control. Good price. *HCC #282*

06



Amazon Fire TV (2017)

→ £70 ★★★★★

HDR playback has been added to Amazon's great-value media streamer, although the absence of an Ethernet port does niggle considering its 4K talents. Cluttered UI. *HCC #280*



Panasonic SC-GA10

→ £230 ★★★★★

Panasonic partners with Google Assistant for its debut smart speaker, and doesn't forget to focus on sonic power as well as AI fun. Pricier than many rivals, but still appealing. *HCC #284*



Apple TV 4K

→ £180 (32GB) ★★★★★

With Apple's iTunes movie store offering 4K HDR (Dolby Vision) movies at the same price as Full HD downloads, this compact media player (irritating handset aside) is sure to tempt. *HCC #284*



PSB Imagine XA

→ £350 ★★★★★

These two-way Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring speakers are fairly chunky, but work well at creating a height layer and the £350-per-pair ticket makes them an enticing option. *HCC #264*



LG WK7

→ £200 ★★★★★

This cylindrical Google Assistant speaker bundles fun voice interaction with a generally pleasing – if not standout – sonic delivery produced in combination with Meridian Audio. *HCC #287*

TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets



Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex – Complete Series Collection: Deluxe Ed.

A 100-page book, and other extras, are bundled with this pricey boxset that collects the brilliant anime's two seasons and three 'OVA' films. *HCC #286*

★★★★★



Heimat: Limited Ed. Boxset

Fifteen hours of epic German TV drama, following a single family from 1919 to 1982, are collected together in this extras-rich BD package from Second Sight. Visuals benefit from a restoration of the original negs. *HCC #285*

★★★★★



Buck Rogers in the 25th Century: The Complete Series

A lack of decent extras takes the shine off this package somewhat, but Buck looks pretty good in HD and the show remains as weird and wonderful as ever. *HCC #285*

★★★★★



Five Tall Tales: Budd Boetticher & Randolph Scott at Columbia, '57-'60

A quintet of Western B-movies receives a deluxe presentation thanks to Indicator's BD package. Comes with a fabulous 80-page book. *HCC #287*

★★★★★



The Deuce: The Complete First Season

David Simon (*The Wire*) is the brains behind this evocative porn industry drama set in 1970s New York. This boxset offers quality AV and a couple of informative chat tracks. *HCC #284*

★★★★★

TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases



01 Yamaha YSP-5600SW →£1,900 ★★★★★
With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar delivers precisely-steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. HCC #254



02 Canton DM55 →£330 ★★★★★
Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doddle to use. Bluetooth built-in. HCC #260



03 Samsung HW-K950 →£1,300 ★★★★★
Soundbar with additional wireless rears and Dolby Atmos support via four upfiring drivers. Impressively largescale performance, good connectivity. No native DTS support. HCC #263



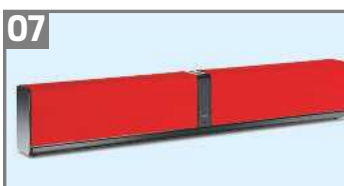
04 Samsung HW-MS750 / SWA-W700 →£700/£600 ★★★★★
Upfiring drivers on this premium 'bar, but no Atmos decoding. Performance still dazzles, and the optional sub shows its merits with movie soundmixes. HCC #278



05 Denon HEOS Bar →£570 ★★★★★
Multiroom-ready and app-controllable, this premium single-enclosure model offers powerful, detailed and warm sonics in spades. Can be expanded into a 5.1 system with extra HEOS hardware. HCC #287



06 Q Acoustics M3 →£300 ★★★★★
A 4in x 6in woofer is tucked away in the M3's eye-catching angular chassis, ensuring this well-priced soundbar has a full-range performance. Simple to use. Bluetooth streaming. HCC #271



07 DALI Kubik One →£800 ★★★★★
The Danish speaker brand brings a slice of glamour to your setup with this stylish soundbar. No HDMI or digital decoding but it packs a tight, lively and nuanced sound. HCC #269



08 JBL Bar Studio →£150 ★★★★★
No subwoofer here, just a fairly compact stereo 'bar that offers a useful soundstage-widening 'Surround' mode, HDMI ARC connectivity, and a decent performance for the price. HCC #284



09 Q Acoustics M2 →£300 ★★★★★
Easily accommodated in/on AV furniture, and packing HDMI ARC for a simple hookup, this BMR-driver/ built-in woofer soundbase impresses with its energetic delivery and price. HCC #279



10 Samsung HW-N650 →£700 ★★★★★
Samsung debuts Acoustic Beam Technology on a 'bar that forgoes Dolby Atmos integration but impresses with its virtual surround. Neat design and articulate, nuanced sonics. Sub needs a bit more slam. HCC #287

TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



The Old Dark House
This James Whale flick from 1932 mixes offbeat humour with disturbing chills. Brought to Blu-ray by Eureka's Masters of Cinema imprint, it's surely never looked better, courtesy of a fresh 4K scan. HCC #287
★★★★★



The Awful Truth
Cary Grant and Irene Dunne star in this 1938 screwball comedy given an assured BD release by The Criterion Collection, with a monochrome image (based on a 4K restoration) that is a joy to behold. HCC #285
★★★★★



Die Hard: 30th Anniversary [Ultra HD Blu-ray]
The fact this celebratory 4K disc offers no new extras is annoying, but otherwise it breathes fresh life into John McTiernan's action/thriller masterpiece. Yippee ki-yay! HCC #287
★★★★★



eXistenZ
101 Films launches its new Black Label imprint with this solid outing for David Cronenberg's 1999 sci-fi mind-melter. Loaded with bonus features, although image quality could perhaps be better. HCC #286
★★★★★



Gladiator [Ultra HD Blu-ray]
Gladiator's troubled home media past can be safely forgotten as Universal has issued a nuanced, contrast-rich 4K HDR (with Dolby Vision) platter, and boosted audio to DTS:X. HCC #287
★★★★★

hi-fi news

THE HOME OF REAL HI-FI

& Record Review

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TOP 5 PVRs



Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it

★★★★★



Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★



Humax FVP-5000T

Revamped menus, faster operation and tweaks to its triple-tuner engine make this the most advanced Freeview Play PVR around – and it doubles admirably as a DLNA player/media jukebox. 500GB/1TB/2TB

★★★★★



Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



EE TV Smart Box £subscription

This quad-tuner 1TB PVR, from the mobile/broadband corp, offers innovative Replay 24-hour channel recording and great Smart device streaming. Needs more catch-up though

★★★★★

TOP 5 Headphones



Sony MDR-HW700DS, £800

Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late-night listening

★★★★★



Nuraphones, £350

Unusual over-ear/in-ear hybrid cans that measure the acoustic response of your inner ear to fine-tune performance. It's a highly impressive trick, but the design can make these a bit uncomfortable to wear.

★★★★★



1More MK802, £150

Ignore the bling-tastic blue or red finishes and focus on the assured sound performance from these well-priced closed-back cans. Features include wireless Bluetooth and app control (with burn-in mode). Great value

★★★★★



Bowers & Wilkins PX, £330

B&W adds noise-cancelling to the general spec of its previous P7 wireless cans, a welcome update for those seeking uninterrupted listening. Offers a neutral, balanced sound suited to both movies and music

★★★★★



Audio Technica ATH-SR9, £400

45mm drivers and Audio Technica's Midpoint Mount tech deliver wide, deep, spacious sonics. Memory foam padding aids listener comfort; 3m cable should suit most AV setups

★★★★★

TOP 5 Wireless speakers



KEF Muo, £300

Portable Bluetooth speaker that's a cut above much of the competition. KEF's sonic knowhow results in a punchy, dynamic presentation that cherishes lossless rips. Excellent build quality

★★★★★



Sony SRS-X11, £60

An affordable palm-sized Bluetooth speaker with internal rechargeable battery, Sony's SRS-X11 is supremely portable and sounds decent for the money. A neat little gizmo. Get two and they can work in stereo

★★★★★



Dynaudio Music 7, £875

Top-of-the-range multiroom option from Dynaudio, this sizable speaker creates a full-range, detailed soundstage. Music App offers useful adjustments and EQ modes. Inputs include HDMI (ARC)

★★★★★



AirPulse Audio A200, £800

Monitor-style active speakers offering physical and wireless hookups, a premium build and a sweet yet weighty sound delivered by ribbon tweeters and 5.1in midbass drivers

★★★★★



Denon HEOS 5 HS2, £350

The mid-range multiroom speaker gets a second-gen revamp, adding welcome hi-res audio playback and Bluetooth connectivity. Gorgeous looks, boisterous, room-filling sound

★★★★★

HOME CINEMA

Choice

→ IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Essential Ultra HD Looking for demo-worthy 4K Blu-rays? Look here

A Quiet Place Sound design masterclass

Sharp LV-70X500E It's the first 8K display you can buy, but should you?

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Philips 55OLED803 4K TV **Panasonic FZ952 4K OLED** **M&K Sound S150 5.1 system** **Optoma HD27e Full HD projector** **TCL 55DC760 4K TV**
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ISSUE
#289 ON SALE
Aug 9

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER



AV Avenger

Dolby Cinema is coming to the UK, but it doesn't have the premium movie business to itself.

Steve May surveys the commercial theatre landscape while hoovering his viewing room...

THE NEWS THAT Dolby has finally cajoled a theatre operator to open Dolby Cinemas in the UK has been met with understandable delight.

The first of these premium movie palaces actually opened Stateside four years ago. I enthused about it in these very pages back in 2015, declaring: 'I've seen the future of movies, and it's called Dolby Cinema.' But it was beginning to seem like UK film fans were never going to get an opportunity to experience this next-gen system for themselves.

Finally, that's about to change. A deal inked with the Odeon Cinemas Group will see seven Dolby Cinemas deployed in the UK 'over the next several years' – a phrase that's worryingly vague if you ask me.

For those not in the know, Dolby Cinema is a sweet confection of Dolby Atmos audio and double-stacked Dolby Vision laser projection, enlivened with proprietary image processing. **Perfect blacks, dazzling HDR, wide colour... imagine over-sized OLED.** Odeon needs Dolby Cinema to upgrade its theatrical offering, and presumably justify higher ticket prices. Its Dolby Cinema screens will apparently be decked out with posh recliner seats and offer 'innovative' food and drink options.

Playing catch-up

Now I'm all for glitz and innovation, and there's no doubt that Dolby Cinema is pretty fabulous, but let's take a breath. It's not like we're being promised a wormhole ride from the fleapits of the 1970s to Tomorrowland. Dolby doesn't have a monopoly on premium movie going. In fact, it's playing catch-up with rivals, and has quite some distance to go; IMAX Corp and Sony now dominate the large-format laser cinema market in the UK and Europe.

Earlier this year, IMAX announced it had partnered with Cineworld to install IMAX Laser screens in 55

more locations across Europe and the US between 2018 and 2022. I've always found IMAX Laser a remarkable visual experience, one that represents a significant improvement over first-gen IMAX theatres.

Like Dolby Vision, the IMAX 4K laser projection system features an advanced optical engine and proprietary technologies for increased resolution and contrast, and it comes wrapped in 12-channel sound.

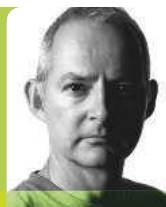
Sony's rival premium cinema experience, FINITY, is also gaining ground, not least because it's arguably the most affordable of all the high-end theatrical options open to cinema operators. Sony's dual 4K laser FINITY projection system has been widely adopted by the likes of Vue International, CinemaxX, Mars Cinema Group and CineCitta, amongst others. If you get to visit London's Leicester Square, run – don't walk – to Vue's recently renovated West End flagship, which offers Sony FINITY with Dolby Atmos in its two largest screens. I caught *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* there, and it was a sublime cinematic experience: breathtaking video quality, outstanding audio and the seating is to die for... all within a perfectly designed auditorium.

And between you and me, I think the latter may be the real secret sauce. Tech alone doesn't make for memorable movie nights. Where, and how, you watch can be just as important. One of the UK's oldest cinemas, the beloved Picture House in Uckfield, is upgrading to Sony 4K projection. It's not FINITY, but I'll bet dollars to doughnuts the moviegoing experience will be just as delightful.

I always find films look better when I tidy up my home theatre room before watching anything. A clear floor equates to clear pictures – a little feng shui with your 4K seems to go a long way ■

*What's your favourite UK commercial cinema?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Steve May's
home cinema
checklist includes
popcorn, cold beer,
a Dolby Atmos
movie disc,
furniture polish and
a feather duster





ALTITUDE¹⁶ + AMPLITUDE^{8m}

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- Intermodulation Distortion: Less than 0.03%.



The background of the advertisement is a close-up, angled view of a Philips OLED TV. The screen is illuminated with a vibrant, abstract image featuring a large, bright yellow and orange sun-like shape on the left, transitioning into a deep blue and purple area on the right. The TV's bezel is dark, and the overall lighting is soft, highlighting the sleek design of the device.

PHILIPS

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